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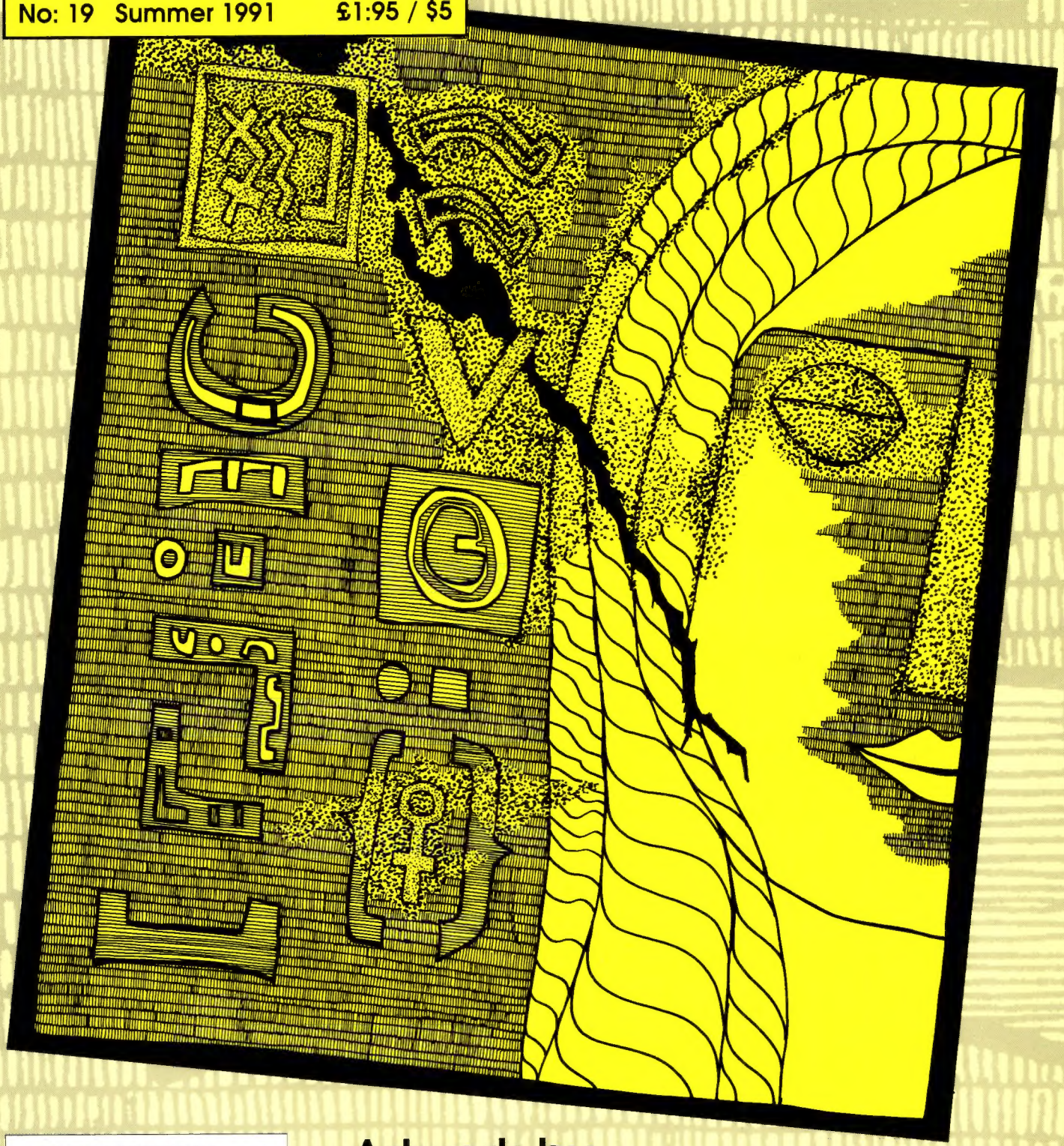

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BBR celebrates "Year's Best" success

We are delighted to report an excellent showing for **BBR** in the "Year's Best" anthologies for 1990.

"Madge" by D.F. Lewis, which first appeared in **BBR** #15, is to be included in *Best New Horror 2*, edited by Stephen Jones and Ramsey Campbell. Des was also a contributor to *Best New Horror 1* last year with "Mort au Monde" from *Dagon* #26.

Also from **BBR** #15, Garry Kilworth's "Truman Capote's Trilby: The Facts" has been chosen for Ellen Datlow's and Terri Windling's *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*. Sadly though, this prestigious collection has been dropped by Legend and is now without a British publisher, and so is unlikely to be readily available in the UK except through specialist dealers and bookshops.

"Truman Capote's Trilby: The Facts" will also appear in *The Best of the Rest* from Edgewood Press (the publishers of *Strange Plasma*). Edited by Steve Pasechnick and Brian Youmans, this new anthology specifically showcases the best SF and fantasy from small press magazines, collections and anthologies. **BBR** is the only British magazine to be featured in the collection.

The full line-ups of *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* and *The Best of the Rest* appear below – and we'll pass on more information about *Best New Horror* as soon as we receive it.

In the meantime, our congratulations to Garry Kilworth and Des Lewis for their success in 1990, and for representing **BBR** in such elevated company. ❑

The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Fourth Annual Collection

edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling

Introduction (Fantasy & Horror 1990; Screen; Obituaries)
Freewheeling – Charles de Lint
Coming Home – Nina Kiriki Hoffman
The Sweeper – George Szanto
Ladies and Gentlemen – Joyce Carol Oates
The Freaktent – Nancy Collins
Missolonghi 1824 – John Crowley
The Last Feast of the Harlequin – Thomas Ligotti
Sounding the Praises of Shadow to the Merchants of Light (poem) – David Memmott
Harvest – Kristine Kathryn Rusch
Fantasy in the Real World (essay) – Susan Cooper
The Dream – Dyan Sheldon
Moths – John Brunner
Frozen Charlottes (poem) – Susan Prospere
Little Dreams, Little Nightmares – Rachel Simon
Timekeeper – John Morressy
Sonata: For Two Friends in Different Times of the Same Trouble (poem) – Ellen Kushner
Death of a Right Fielder – Stuart Dybek
Not From Around Here – David J. Schow
Lieserl – Karen Joy Fowler
The Last Game – Sharon M. Hall
Offerings – Susan Palwick
The Muses of Rooms (poem) – Vern Rutsala
A Touch of the Old Lilith – Nina Kiriki Hoffman
The Calling – David Silva
TV People – Haruki Murakami *(translated from the Japanese by Alfred Birnbaum)*
In the Trees – Steve Rasnic Tem
Truman Capote's Trilby: The Facts – Garry Kilworth
Green – Ian R. MacLeod
Dark Hills, Hollow Clocks – Garry Kilworth
The Panic Hand – Jonathan Carroll
Bestseller – Michael Blumlein
Nanny Peters and the Feathery Bride – Delia Sharman
Out of Sight, Out of Mind – Jack Womack
Midwife to the Fairies – Eilis Ni Dhuibhne
The Phone Woman – Joe R. Lansdale
Ladder – T.E.D. Klein
Alice, Falling – Steven Millhauser

The Best of the Rest 1990

edited by Steve Pasechnick and Brian Youmans

Mirage Diver – Terry Dowling, *Rynosseros*
Peri – Carol Emshwiller, *Strange Plasma* #3
Muffin Explains Teleology to the World at Large – James Alan Gardner, *On Spec* Spring 1990
Truman Capote's Trilby: The Facts – Garry Kilworth, **BBR** #15
Sonata – Ellen Kushner, *Monochrome: The Readercon Anthology*
Maleficent Morning – R.A. Lafferty, *Early Lafferty II*
Gooba Gabba – Matt Lowe, *The Great Swamp Gazette* Vol.13 #5
5 Cigarettes and 2 Snakes – Geoffrey Maloney, *Aurealis* #1
The Allah Stairs – Jamil Nasir, *Tales of the Unanticipated* #7
Generation Gap – George Turner, *Pursuit of Miracles*
"... And They Shall Wander All Their Days" – David Tansey, *Aurealis* #1

Ashputtle: *or*, The Mother's Ghost – Angela Carter
Face to Face – Adrian Cole
The Dog's Tale – Karel Capek *(translated from the Czech by Dagmar Herrmann)*
Stephen – Elizabeth Massie
A Short Guide to the City – Peter Straub
The Story of Little Briar-Rose, A Scholarly Study – R.A. Lafferty
Coyote V. Acme – Ian Frazier
The First Time – K.W. Jeter
Arousal – Richard Christian Matheson
The Beast (poem) – Gwen Strauss
The Waiting Wolf (poem) – Gwen Strauss
Two Words – Isabel Allende *(translated from the Spanish by Alberto Manguel)*
Snapshots from the Butterfly Plague – Michael Bishop
The All-Consuming – Lucius Shepard and Robert Frazier
The Sadness of Detail – Jonathan Carroll
Honorable Mentions: 1990

Scanner no more

Sadly, *The Scanner* has announced that it is ceasing publication with the current issue, #11, due to financial difficulties. A founder member of the NSFA, *The Scanner* was renowned for its enthusiastic approach to publishing and, despite a number of setbacks, always maintained a regular schedule.

The recession and the Gulf War are blamed for the delays at *New Pathways* by editor Mike Adkisson, who also announces a change of address. However, *NP* #19 has just come out, and NSFA subscribers should be receiving their copies any day now. The new address for *NP* is: MGA Services, PO Box 475174, Garland, Tx 75047-5174.

Other good news is that the Canadian magazine *Edge Detector* is to be relaunched by Glenn Grant, whilst the widely-advertised glossies *R.E.M* and *protoStellar* have also produced their first issues.

New magazines are still coming to our attention:

» **The Lyre #1**: A4, 40pp, £2:20 from Nicholas Mahoney, 275 Lonsdale Avenue, Intake, Doncaster DN2 6HJ
» **The Dream Cell #1**: A5, 32pp, £1 from Shân Schofield, c/o 7 Walmersley Road, New Moston, Manchester M10 0RS
» **New Dawn Fades #9**: A4, 48pp, £1:50 from Gavin Boyter, 2 Woodfield Avenue, Colinston, Edinburgh EH13 0HX
» **Arcanum #1**: A4, 48pp, £3:50 from Stephen Sennitt, 15 Oxford Street, Mexborough, South Yorks S64 9RL

If you're interested in subscribing or contributing, then send them an SAE or 2 IRCs for more information. ❑

Living in a box?

Nine months after we announced our change of address, a lot of people are still using the old Chesterfield, Derbyshire address to contact **BBR**. Despite our best efforts, it also appears that some magazines are not using the up-to-date information when mentioning **BBR**, further complicating the problem.

Unfortunately, changing to the PO Box in Sheffield was not simply a matter of convenience, but coincided with a change of premises for **BBR** HQ. Whilst we don't actually *live* in the PO Box, it does remain the only way to reach the magazine, and sending mail to any other address just causes delays through redirection.

We'd therefore be very grateful if you could send all letters, subscriptions and manuscripts to:

BBR, PO Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY, UK

Our overseas subscription addresses as listed opposite remain unchanged.

BBR on tour

The **BBR** staff put in their regular appearance at the British National SF Convention in Glasgow over Easter, catching up on gossip and manning the NSFA table in the dealers' room. Spotted within six feet of the Editor, and sometimes even talking to him included:

The Glasgow posse: Jim Steel, Gary Gibson, Michael Mooney, Brian Waugh, Gerry Morton, Michael Cobley, Kevin Kelly and Veronica Colin; the BSFA posse: Kev McVeg, Cecil Nurse, Mick Mahoney and Ian Sales (on loan from *The Lyre*), Maureen Speller *(sic)* and Paul Kincaid *(very sic)*; plus numerous other devotees including Moira Shearman, Ian Brooks, Graham Joyce, Iain Banks, David Garnett, Eric Arthur, Eric Brown, Cyril Simsa, Eva Hauser, Peter Garrett, Thomas Recktenwald, Brendan Ryder, Nic Farey, SMS, David Windett, Sue Mason and Martin Tudor.

Five weeks later we whooped it up on Corona (not the fizzy-pop type) at Mexicon in Harrogate. No NSFA table this time, as Chris was needed for panels, so more chance to mingle, as it were. Many of the Eastercon crew were much in evidence (sorry people, you don't get mentioned twice!), and it was also good to meet up with such other folk as:

Roger Culpan, Jason Hurst, Howard Waldrop, Stuart Falconer, Dave Mooring, Jason Smith, John Duffield, Mick Norman, Andy Richards, David Pringle *(but where was Ann?)*, Geoff Ryman and Brian Stableford.

We had a great time at both conventions, so see you all again in Blackpool next year, and Harrogate in '93. ❑

MAUREEN SPELLER

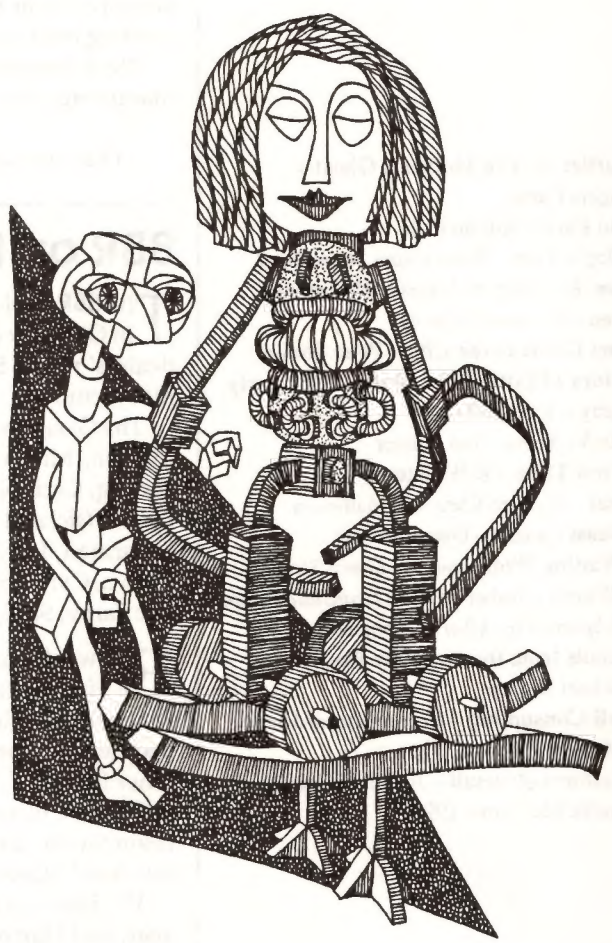
BRAIN FEVER

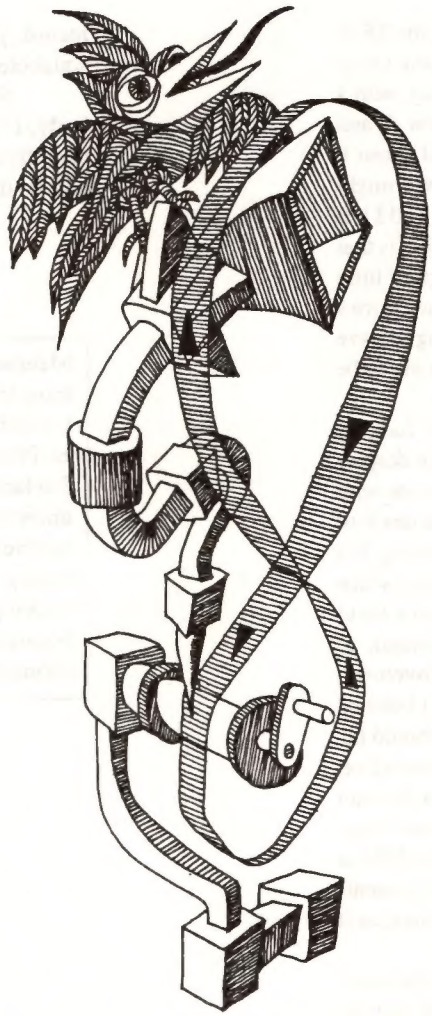
Tell me something: what is it about SF which depresses people so much? No, I'm not talking about that hoary old chestnut about SF needing to be positive, life-affirming. It's difficult to feel positive about anything when half the world is over-consuming, the other half would be grateful for the odd crumb from the table, and the likelihood that we'll drown when the ice caps melt, or dehydrate when the earth burns up. No, I'm talking about the way it depresses the very people who are involved in producing, devouring and commenting on SF. It's almost *de rigeur* these days to be assuring one another that the genre is going to hell in a supermarket trolley, with all of us firmly hanging on to the handles. We're doomed, a little voice whispers in my ear.

I mean, take last weekend. I'm sitting there going through piles of old BSFA magazines (well, someone has to do it), and I find three, yes three articles, all by the same person and written over a period of six or seven years, all lamenting the imminent demise of the genre we love to hate. The most recent was dated sometime in the mid eighties, in which case I can only comment that the patient is doing remarkably well considering the prognosis. But that article could have been written last week. It's the same wherever I go right now – this uncomfortable feeling of déjà vu, the sense that we're saying the same old things over and over.

Perhaps it's become a habit, and a bad one at that. Perhaps we're the last of that strange breed of romantic being who thought that palely loitering on the edge of death was a cool thing to be doing. Well, you palely loiter if you want to, but if you carry on much longer, I might decide to put you out of my misery, the quick way, with a humane killer. Don't get me wrong. I think there's a lot at fault with SF, but equally I don't believe that writing obituaries is the proper way to solve matters. For a start, what the hell would you be writing an obituary for?

Defining science fiction is not so much a favourite fireside pastime these days as a whole minor industry in itself. Quite apart from a distinctly identifiable commercial genre which sells indecently large quantities of frequently terrible books, there is so much stuff sitting under the SF umbrella that it makes me quite dizzy to think about it all. The 'literature of ideas' claim some, as if proposing that a lot of other material which likes to call itself literature contains no ideas whatsoever, a dodgy sort of argument if you ask me, one doomed to failure and guaranteed to leave egg all over the wrong faces. I might feel more comfortable with the literature of 'what if', except that most fiction writing surely has a 'what if' lurking in its core. It's just that SF wears its ideas and 'what ifs' more clearly on its sleeve. Aha, a literature with an agenda then? Yes but – 'Sci-fi has spaceships in it, doesn't it?' cooed my boyfriend's boss last week. Why not – as a definition, it's as good as any other, but it's not mine any more than it might be yours, his, hers (waves hand wildly round room in exasperation). The Movement reckons we need technological awareness, Kessel & Co reckon we need human values, I reckon we should stop scrutinising the fluff in our navels, stop worrying about what we ought to be doing, stop lamenting what we didn't become, and get on with being ourselves, whatever that happens to be.





The trouble is, from where I'm sitting we come on like a bunch of squabbling brats with this thing for nostalgia, and I can't say I find that edifying. God, what an irony. Here we are, a thrusting literature, supposedly breaking new ground, straining the literary boundaries, trampling on delicate sensibilities, and all we do is get tangled up in finding the right label, or else spend our days looking over our shoulders at what's gone before, lamenting the fact that we can't get back to where we were. Why should we want to, for heaven's sake? Short answer: because we at least know where we were. It's not good enough, is it. Oh, I recognise that it's a simple matter of a need, a yearning for security, but this strikes me as being seriously at odds with a literature which is supposedly testing the limits and, dare I suggest it, meant to be taking risks.

How else, for example can you explain this terrible desire that some writers seem to have to hitch their wagon to any comfortably-labelled star? Cyberpunk, for example. I name no names, but if you're squirming in your seats, I guess that's because you know what I'm talking about. Quite apart from the people who are out for a quick buck from a gullible public, are the people who want to belong to something. It may be as cynical a move as that of the quick-buck merchants, the recognition that being part of a visible 'group' is not going to hurt the old career prospects. It may simply be that it undoubtedly does feel nice to be part of the in-group, a very understandable attraction given the rabid hostility of so many 'mainstream' writers and critics (what are we to do with Fay 'SF isn't literature' Weldon?), but I tell you, I curse the day that Gardner Dozois, or whoever it was, labelled that bunch of writers producing a distinctive and different kind of SF, notable for its techie trappings. The next thing you know there's a battle royal going on between the people who think this was the only true way to write, and the others who want to do something different. But if it ain't got a computer in it, it ain't new and thrusting. So tell Charles Babbage all about it!

And it's going to happen again. You know that? Any minute now. The moment that the first edition of the new, re-vamped *New Worlds* hits the shelf. This is a Bad Move, let me tell you that. And I'll tell you why. It is going to provide a lot of people with another comfortable label to cling to, and what's more, a label with built-in, convenient, easy-to-use, non-fattening, non-addictive, additive-free nostalgia. Well, perhaps not non-addictive but definitely the best of all worlds, if not necessarily New Worlds.

Now let's get one or two things straight at the outset. I am not, I repeat not, anti-*New Worlds*. *New Worlds*, by which we inevitably understand the *New Worlds* of Michael Moorcock (did you know that *New Worlds* existed prior to Moorcock's editorship? You did? Great! You'd be amazed at the number of people who don't possess that important fact. And you know about all the post-Moorcockian incarnations too? You don't? Well hey, that's not so great) was a Good Thing. It blew away a lot of large, furry cobwebs, and encouraged people to experiment, experiment, experiment. Of course, not all the experiments were successful, but that's showbiz. Neither am I against the notion of another available market. I think this is also a Very Good Thing. Nor do I wish to impugn David Garnett's skills as an editor. *Zenith* wasn't always my cup of tea, but it published some damn good people. What I am saying is that Gollancz giving us the new *New Worlds* is a Very Bad Thing. It could set back our literary development god knows how many years. Here's a true story. I was recently at a workshop discussion where the matter of *New Worlds* came up, and someone told this story. They work with someone who used to read SF. To be precise, he used to read *New Worlds*. He never read anything else but *New Worlds*, not even the novels by the writers from *New Worlds*. Nothing but *New Worlds*. When it finally went down the tube, he stopped reading. The workshop attendee recently told him that *New Worlds* was starting up again and by all accounts, his eyes lit up as he realised that what he had liked reading was coming back. The workshopper didn't have the heart to explain that SF isn't necessarily like that any more. Mind you, I'd love to know what a mind unsullied by recent debates would make of it all. The ultimate review.

Putting aside what some might regard as cynical manipulation of an emotive name, *New Worlds* is a title with a lot of cultural baggage. Say it now and the cognoscenti know what you mean, but so do a lot of other people who have gone beyond devouring the new-old Asimov, at least they think they understand. They know about Ballard, Moorcock, M. John Harrison *et al*, the ones who survived. But in among the gold was a hell of a lot of dross. You'd be amazed at just how godawful some of it was. But a distance of twenty-odd years, a goodly helping of nostalgia and anyone who was ever, however remotely involved, is somehow touched with the wonder of *New Worlds*. That's bad enough in itself. There's a pernicious tendency to automatically accept that what popular opinion states is 'classic' therefore must be classic, and it's no more true of the product of *New Worlds* than it is of the 'Golden Age'. And every author has an off-day.

What worries me more is that the *New Worlds* of today will almost certainly be a very different animal to its predecessor. At least, I hope damn well it is; if it isn't, then the problems are bigger and badder than I ever envisaged. However, whatever it turns out to be, and the most important thing to bear in mind is that it has a different editor this time, it is going to have to carry round the cultural baggage of its predecessor. It will be measured by the successes and failures of its predecessor. It will confer the cachet of its predecessor on people who, however good they might be, would not wish to be associated with the old New Wave. It is already being seized upon as the tool of change for SF in

the nineties, because of what its predecessor did for SF in the sixties. This poor mewling and puking infant Great White Hope is going to stagger into the light of day with a pre-ordained mission to save the world as we know it, and a lot of people are going to be very disappointed if it doesn't.

Will it? How can I say? Whatever else we might want it to be, SF is not the literature of prediction and I left my crystal ball in my other pocket. What I am saying is that we have to think very hard before seizing on this poor little magazine as the saviour of the literature. Put not your stories into one anthology, after all. Equally, we are going to have to take care not to dismiss it out of hand if it turns out to be something completely different from its ancestor.

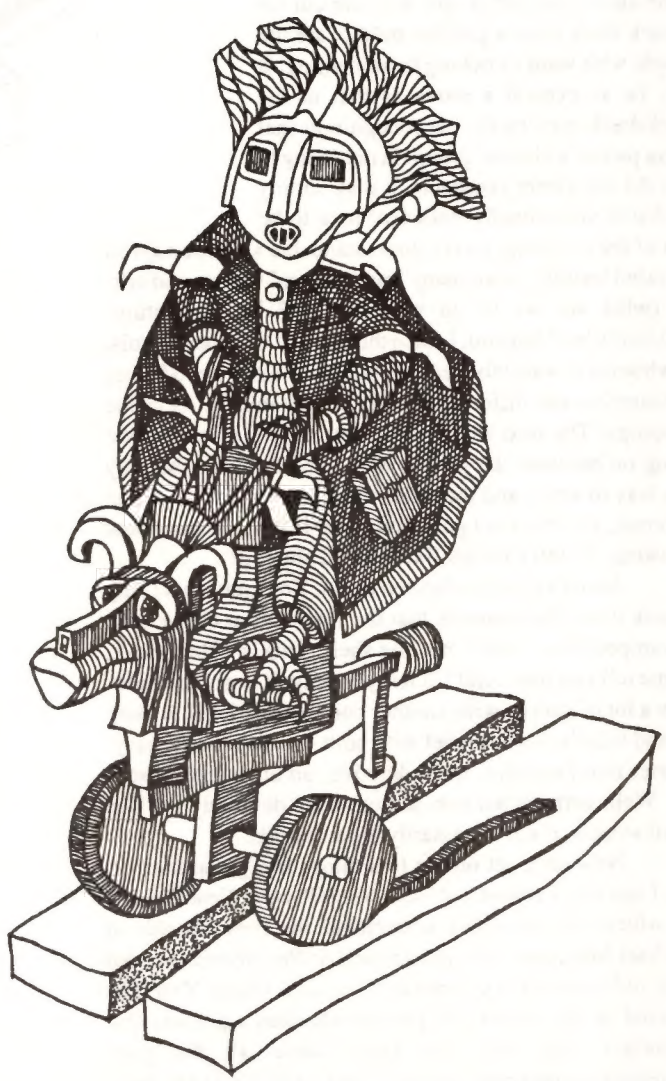
And why do we need a Great White Hope? Judging from the tone of comments I read and hear, people desperately need something to focus on. It just puzzles me why they have to focus on something so negative as the death of SF, and then look for something to stop this happening. It's a pretty weird sort of motivation, almost necrophiliac when you think about it. It's not as though we haven't got a lot to be cheerful about. The Science Fiction Underground, as characterised by John Shirley, rottweiler of The Movement, is alive and well and kicking ass like you wouldn't believe. Well, some of it is, but in any society there is, or should be, a constant tugging between the radical and the conservative, the avant-garde and the traditional (and no Virginia, I do not propose to offer a definition), which is an important function of much of the small press. I like to think of the SFU as a hotbed of dissent and discussion, not petty arguments about who is a British humanist with c/punk leanings, as if it really mattered.

Of course, it's when the tugging stops that the problems really start. Recently, I read someone saying that the New Wave had united the SF writers in this country, brought them all together in a common cause. At the time I thought how cosy and supportive that sounded, but tolerably mature reflection makes me wonder whether it wasn't that unity which mysteriously lost us a generation of writers somewhere after the likes of Holdstock, Priest, Kilworth and Evans, and before the latest wave of thrusting young writers. If everyone agrees, how can there be dissent and discussion.

Earlier, I said I was depressed by the nostalgia kick, and depressed by the squabbling. Squabbling is not the same as good healthy conflict. Squabbling is what we descend into when we try to give ourselves names, labels, categories and then offer them as the one true way, drawing lines between groups we like and groups we don't like. Pat Murphy commented that she can't understand why so much energy is expended on drawing lines and labelling categories. Neither can I. Think of what could be done with that energy. No, I'm not saying that polemic is bad, just that misdirected polemic is unnecessary. Me, I go with Damon Knight – SF is what I point to when I say SF. I know what I mean, and I'm prepared to discuss it, endlessly, particularly as the meaning shifts from day to day, depending on what I'm reading, but I'm not planning to set up the one true church and get 'holier than thou' about it. And I say that not as a 'bleeding heart' liberal, but more as someone who is sick and tired of reading about why what I read isn't SF, is SF, might be SF if there's an R in the month. Dammit, I've been reading varieties of the Fantastic for nearly twenty-five years, I mean, you'd think I'd have some idea by now. Considering how many people could boast a similar track record, you'd think they had a few clues as well, so why squabble?

Still, so long as there are people to squabble over the body, I suppose that means it's worth something to someone, thank goodness. So if you'll excuse me, I'll stand aside and let the latest resuscitation team see what it can do. ❑

Maureen Speller lives in Folkestone, which accounts for most things, and is better known for being the ex-BSFA Co-ordinator, ex-editor of both *Matrix* and *The Gate*, and ex-Porter than for anything she's doing right now. She freelances as critic, editor, reviewer, publisher's reader, university student, anything to avoid a 9-5 job. Her hobbies include teaching her cats about cyberpunk, boring her boyfriend to death with literary theory, cooking mega-lethal chillis and not writing fiction. Maureen will be contributing "Brain Fever" as a regular column to **BBR**.



MOGOLLÓN NEWS

by **UNCLE RIVER**
Our New Mexico Correspondent

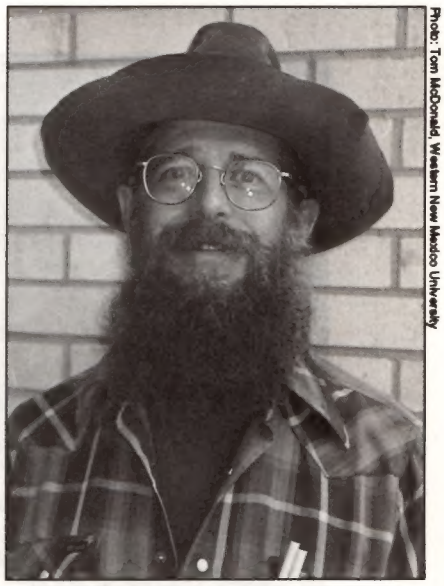


Photo: Tom McDonald, Western New Mexico University

Politics

The Bloated Goat Saloon closed for the season Thursday before Memorial Day.

Some folks might think it contrary to shut down a public establishment just when tourist traffic is picking up. Some folks don't know Jim and Melissa Farnsworth, the proprietors.

According to Jim and Melissa, the Bloated Goat just is not big enough to accommodate the number of people who would want to use it in summer. There is not enough space for parking either. This may be true, but everyone in Mogollón believes the real reason they shut down is politics.

Jim and Melissa are, once again, running against each other for mayor of Mogollón. With primaries over, they figure it is time to hit the campaign trail.

The campaign trail is fairly short actually — ever since the time, a few years back, when they drove into the Pacific — Pacific Mine that is, and had to hire a team of mules to haul them back out again. However, Silver Creek Canyon has rarely been graced with such oratory (or slander, depending on your point of view) as our worthy mayoral candidates on the stump.

Melissa is running as a Federalist. Jim is running as a Whig. They campaign together. Precisely what their program is for the future glory of Mogollón remains somewhat murky. Their opinion of one another, however, is brilliantly displayed for all the world to hear — or at least local residents of voting age.

The entire population of Mogollón has long since made it clear that any mayor who tries to raise a budget of over thirty-four cents from local taxes of any kind will be tarred and feathered and dropped down the Glory Hole. However, Jim and Melissa campaigning is a good enough show that quite a few people will feed them dinner when they come around. — And folks remember how generously they hand out rounds on the house in winter.

Elvira Sonderfeld even puts on an open house. People weren't sure she would be up for it this year as she is now eighty-five. "When I was forty-five, I lied about my age. Now I'm proud of it," she says.

It is not altogether clear whether Elvira's open house is really for Jim and Melissa's benefit or just so the bears can show off their new cubs. She hasn't set the date yet, but she has already started cooking. It should be a good one.

Jim and Melissa are well into their campaign. The invective and breaking crockery are frequently audible clear to South Fork. ✹

A Case Of Religion

Bulldog and Petunia are back after nearly a year away. They went up to see Petunia's sister, Sue-Jean, at Hungry Horse, Montana, the first of last June, but about the time they got ready to come back, Petunia wasn't feeling well.

Turned out Petunia's ailment was morning sickness. Bulldog got offered a good job at a sawmill. What with one thing and another, it has taken them till now to make it home.

The baby was born Feb. 23 in Sue-Jean's living room. They named him Samuel Hungry Horse. So let's all give a big welcome to little Sammy, the first member of the new generation to make his home in Mogollón in several years.

Unfortunately, during his stay up north, Bulldog came down with a terrible case of religion. Petunia got it too, but not so bad.

Whether it was the Montana winter or being a father did it to Bulldog is hard to say. Now he goes around all the time telling people what God has his permission to do.

Bulldog is still the best mechanic any town could ask for. He's got his old job back at the mine, and we hear George Nevil has been talking to him about putting in a shop to go with the winch truck.

All of Mogollón is pleased to see Bulldog and Petunia home and proud as family to have little Sammy among us. We just hope Bulldog recovers soon from his awful affliction.

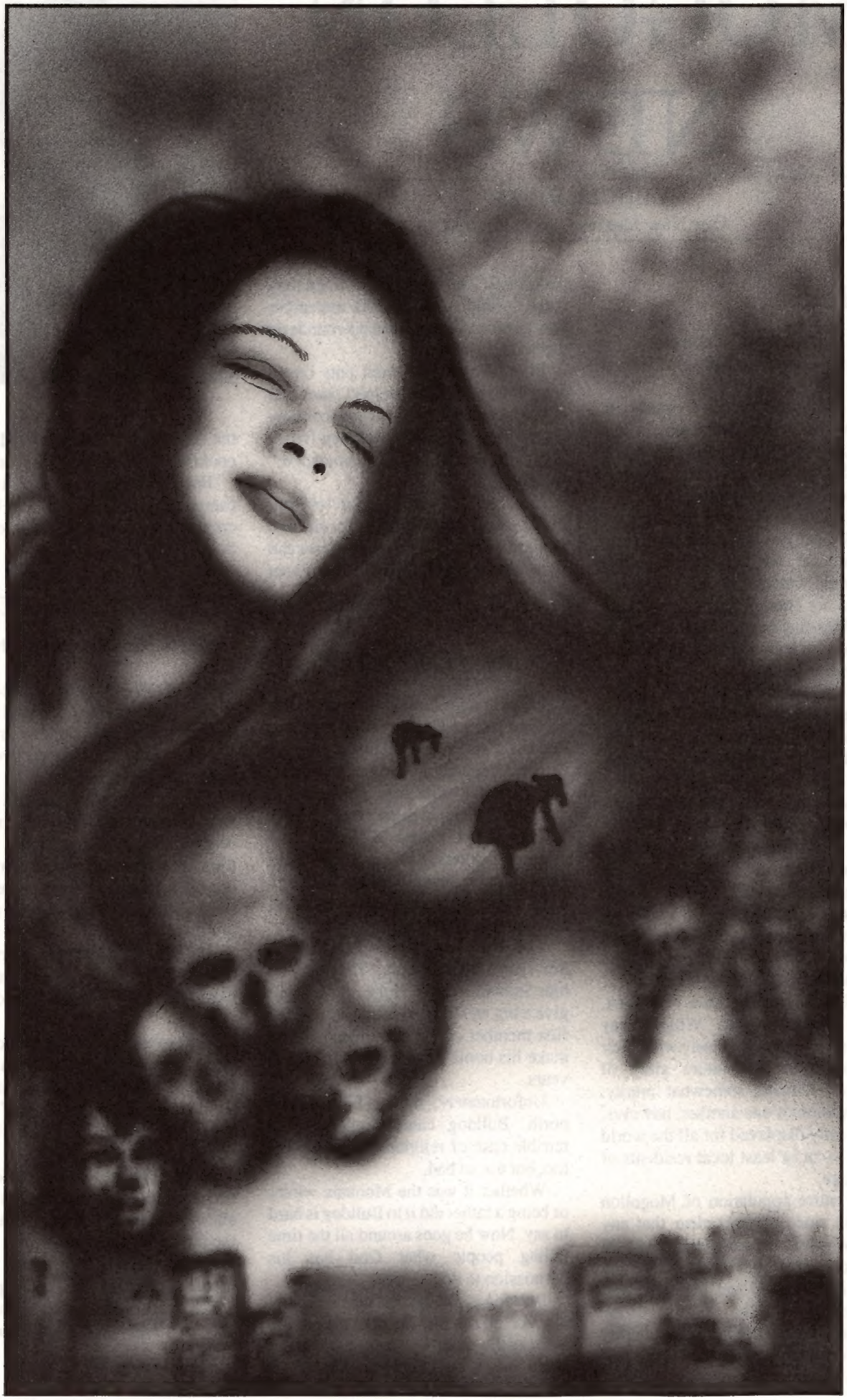
The winch truck got quite a workout last Sunday afternoon: someone blocked the whole road trying to turn a travel trailer around where there wasn't enough room. There were about thirty-five cars lined up when George got there.

He got that trailer out all right, but one of the tires caught on a rock and went flat. The owner wouldn't pay George.

That evening someone noticed there was a travel trailer parked outside the Bloated Goat Saloon with a bunged up tire tied on the back. It wasn't parked very well either and was blocking traffic.

By the time the owner came out the travel trailer was out of the way. It was sitting neat as can be in a vacant lot on the far side of the creek.

Unfortunately, there is no crossing in that particular spot. A good powerful winch truck was about the only way, short of a helicopter, to get it back on the road. ✹



CHIPPOKE NA GOMI

(Tiny Dust)

MISHA

It is raining sand and dirt. It slithers down in truckloads and flows around his feet, spattering his shoes and his gray slacks and the hem of his duster. The red bricks of the station platform spit at him as he leans forward to catch sight of the connection.

His leather bags heel at his feet like two black lizards. He grabs their collars and drags them hissing across the gritty floor of the station.

He frowns, straining with the luggage. It grows heavier with each mile.

He focuses on a shadow etched against the wall. It is a shadow of a missing person bent over in thought.

His eyes bounce the room. He sees the eclipsed woman in a soft sable coverall. The coverall has a flame colored lantern patch on the shoulder. She is leaning forward with her elbows on her knees. Her head is down and her hands are lightly held in interlocking fingers. When he blinks she is all flat again, like a shadow.

He slides the bags over to the bench and sits down.

He brushes the raindust off of his coat and stares at her. The sun slides through an opening in the cloud.

Small strings of dust float from the ceiling toward the floor.

He sneezes.

A brown bottle bounces across the tile floor. He turns and sees a tattered derelict stagger out of the door. From him rags unravel and fall into the debris of the station. The sake bottle rolls up against a hairy dust bunny under the benches.

A huge column of purple and orange flame is rising.

A phone jangles and echoes in the station. He turns his head. The station-master croaks into the receiver. He cocks his head expectantly, listening.

He hears someone crying on the other end of the line.

He looks at the shadow woman. Her coverall is stained at the knees and elbows with a thick white ash. She is wearing scorched hightops with yellow flames embossed on them.

Carbonized timbers and beams twist and burn hundreds of feet above the ground.

He can't ever remember being this tired. Or this thirsty. He hopes to waken himself in her conversation.

"In Japan they have trains that travel 120 miles an hour and this one is 120 minutes late."

She looks straight ahead, then slowly turns her head toward him. She has the dusky complexion and features of an Aino but he decides she is American Indian.

"Were you in Japan?" Her voice is soft bran. It makes his throat itch.

"That's right." He coughs into his white gloves. "I've been studying Japanese dust."

Although her eyes are huge and dark, he can't help but notice that they are inflamed and sticky at the corners. A little whitish matter clings there.

He rubs his nose. "I'm a konologist."

An inch thick of gray ash covers everything. As he tries to write her a letter, the brush drags into the ash falling on the rice paper.

She chews the inside of her cheek.

Her feral look and a strange efflorescence on her cheeks alarm him.

He pulls out his white kerchief.

She scrunches up her nose. "Konologist." The word breaks in her mouth, as if she spoke around grains of sand.

Her voice grates on him, but he continues.

"The study of dust." He slides closer to her to obscure her shadow. He notices she is wearing a fine covering of face powder which makes her skin look slightly farinaceous.

Her bruised looking eyes fasten on his bags. "And what is in there? Dust I suppose."

He is reluctant to answer. A strange weakness sluices in his bowels and travels down his legs. He wants to lie down.

He has no energy to hunt her ashes in the ruins.

That the train is late is amplified in the cave-like hollowness of the station. The only sound, besides the falling of the dust and his raspy breathing, is the heavy impact of the freight cars slamming together in the yard. Metal couples spark against metal couples, throwing minute particles of oil soaked dirt into the air. Rusty filings grind on the track as steel rolls on steel.

He smiles at her. Her return smile is hot ice.

A terrible thirst.

He is feeling better, more at home. He calls to the stationmaster.

"Could you please tell me what the hold up is?"

"Bad dust storm about thirty miles out. They're clearing the tracks now." After he speaks his face disintegrates into chalky disinterest.

He rolls his eyes at the woman and shakes his head slowly. He brushes some lint off of his knees.

He checks his watch, then slaps his hand over it. He has just changed it to pacific time and finds it still reading Tokyo time July 15, a whole day ahead.

Boats of lantern fire.

The sable woman stares at his bag.

He sighs and stands up. "Excuse me," he says and walks to the pay telephone. It is grimy with use. Little circles of white have been cleared by fingertips dragging in the caked dirt beneath the dial wheel. He removes his gloves.

He dials his house and after a time there is an answer.

It is his wife – living migraine.

"The train has been delayed. I didn't want you to worry."

"I was napping, asleep." The *was* hisses in the Migraine's mouth, between her sharp white teeth.

"I'll be along anytime." He is cutting into her chest with a letter opener. Her skin is like a paper bag. Lint and thick gray dust pour out of her lungs, along with pins, seeds, and an apple green condom of a kind he never wears. It is sticky with semen and dog hair.

His wife is silent while he does this, then answers "Fine." in a voice that means he is not welcome.

He feels his whole life comminated into this one emotionless phone call.

A miasma of heat and dust.

He sits near the shadow woman. She seems to crumble in front of his eyes. Dust swirls in the open door of the station.

"I think some of the dust is leaking out of those bags." Her face is deadpan, as if she is serious.

A laugh splinters his throat. "No, it's all sealed in vacuum jars." He reaches into his bag and pulls out a small glass jar of ashy looking dust.

The woman shimmers in a sudden bright shaft of light.

Lightening, roar, rice white calx, black soil.

"I think some of that dust has escaped." She repeats.

He studies the jar closely, shaking it in the air to catch the light. "Impossible."

She doesn't seem convinced.

He feels he needs to make an explanation. "You see, dust is a fascinating thing. Have you ever, for example, looked at dust under an electron microscope?"

A sheet of sun falls through the window. She shakes her head.

He sets the jar of dust on the bench, reaches over into his bag and removes a thin green book.

He opens it to a page that is covered with large grains of grayish rice.

"What do you suppose that is?" he asks as he hands her the book and slides close enough to see it over her shoulder.

She shrugs. He sniffs her odor of baby powder. He wonders why women wash off and then dust themselves with talcum.

He glances at her and seems caught in her flat black eyes. A line of sweat pops out on his upper lip.

She stares at the plate a moment and then speaks in a dull, uninterested voice. "Dust."

He draws the kanji for man in the powder.

He is disappointed she knows his answer. "That's right! Though most people would say 'grains of rice'. Look at this." It is a 100 times enlargement of a piece of pollen. It looks like a small moon pitted with craters.

He points to another grainy photo. It is a monstrous creature with a vicious set of mandibles and repulsive grape-like clusters on its hairy legs.

A mass for dead insects.

"This tiger mite is too small to be identified by the naked eye, and yet –" he taps the clusters, "it has its own parasites even smaller."

He looks closely at the plate himself, though he has seen it many times, this time he sees something different. He sees a human face trapped between two tiny pieces of dust.

He snaps the book shut and tosses it in his bag.

He holds up his jar of dust and peers at the label.

"Dust tells us much about our history. You might be interested to know," he says boldly, "that this dust from Nagasaki is still radioactive. Even after all these years."

A crimson display of pyrotechnics explodes in her eyes.

"Yes, that's right." He replaces the jar carefully, as if it is worth its weight in gold. "This dust is full of pulverized buildings, books, dinnerware, bamboo stalks and grains of rice – remnants of a great city."

She stares fixedly at his shoes.

A field of carbonated bone.

He talks on a bit, but soon notices her fixation.

"Excuse me but," he captures her attention.

She looks at him with cold mineral eyes.

They are like highly polished mirrors and in them he can see it. A huge column

of dust traveling up and up and finally spreading out in a horizontal bank of cloud. In the cloud, thousands of faces, ancestors come for bon mitsuri.

She points at his shoes. "They're covered with the victims of Nagasaki."

Before he replies, the bellowing of the diesel horn, the grating of steel on pitted steel and the roaring of the engine meet his ears.

From the west a terrible arimitama wind.

He jumps forward to grab her hand and the skin peels off just like a glove. She suddenly flares in a pillar of fire and a wave of intense heat sears his eyes.

He falls to his knees and cries out in terror and pain.

The train roars in and pulls away while he is still kneeling in the station with a handful of crematory ashes.

It is pale dust, gray and gritty and still warm.

A fine sandy loess blows about his knees.

The station is whirling with small dust devils. Through them he can see a dark shape.

"Ahhh!" He staggers to his feet and runs forward. She is not there but her shadow remains permanently scorched into the station wall.

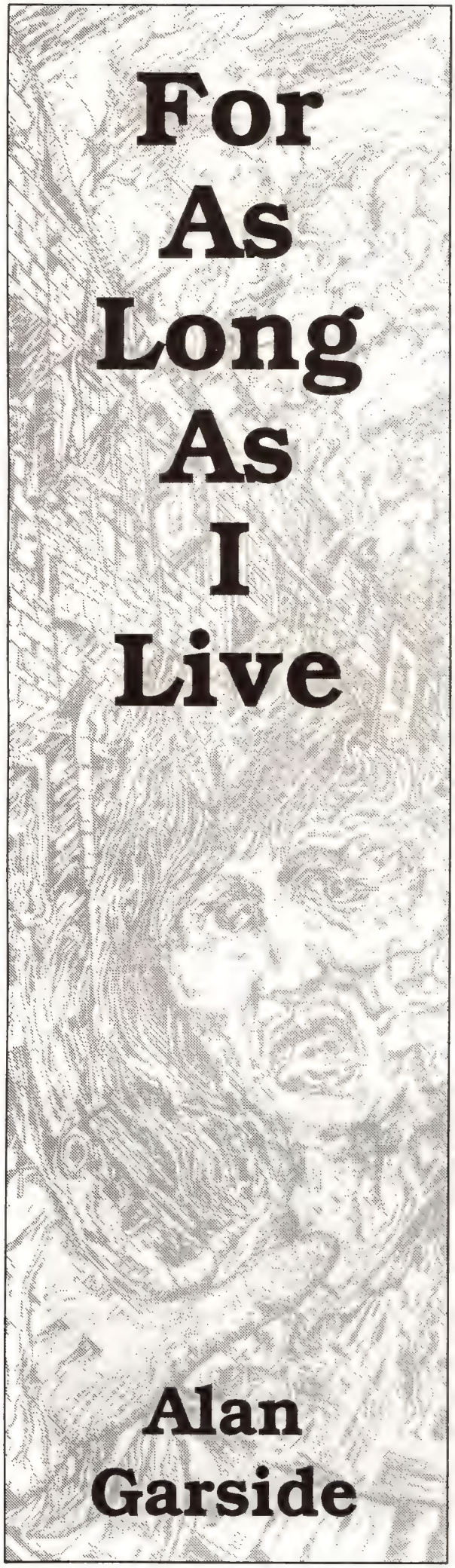
He exclaims again and holds the ashes tightly in his fist. The tighter he holds them, the more they slip through his fingers.

With each step he takes he shakes the dust from his feet. His eyes seem to stare blankly ahead.

But he is focusing very intently on one thing.

The tiny motes of dust dancing in a red shaft of sunlight. ❑

Misha's first novel, *Red Spider, White Web*, was nominated for the Arthur C. Clarke Award earlier this year, and she has also earned widespread acclaim for her collection of short prose, *Prayers of Steel*. She is a former fiction editor of *New Pathways*, and has a regular review column in *Science Fiction Eye*. "Chippoke Na Gomi" first appeared in the USA in the literary journal *Witness*.



The memory of a coastal town began to slip from her mind. The holidaymakers would soon be returning to their homes and jobs, but they were no longer a part of Janet's life. She was lost to the world now, having reached out to the promise of life everlasting – how long ago?

Janet Godbehere had spent her last full day in the natural world at a nearby ruin, feeling at one with the old walls and crumbling towers. Old things fascinated her; she clung to the remnants of time long past, longing for the secret of their survival. She heard no echoes of distant lives, just the peacefulness of eternity. If only she could stand among them, resolute, needing nothing more in her life. Did that seem inhuman, wanting to leave the world behind forever? She watched a gull land on a broken wall close by and cock its head to one side as it eyed her warily.

Overhead the sun moved west and Janet emerged from her deep contemplation of the land stretched out ahead of her. She decided it was time to make her way back to the town, where boats were bobbing in the shallow bay and people were making their plans for the evening. When she arrived at the flatlets where she was staying she saw Mrs Gillain standing on the front lawn, her small withered hands gripping her chair which she was hardly able to carry. "Can I help?" she asked.

"Thank you. Have you been out walking?" asked the old lady, looking at Janet's jeans and sturdy shoes.

"Just up to the ruins. It's nice and peaceful up there."

"You ought to be out with someone, a nice looking girl like you."

Janet smiled and carried the chair inside. Mrs Gillain chatted away as she followed. "I know how it is with you. You're a daydreamer; I can always tell. None of this is important to you, only what you imagine for yourself. You live in another world." Mrs Gillain crossed the living room of her flat and settled herself contentedly in her chair. Janet admired the fortitude of the seventy-three-year-old woman, and wondered how she was able to put up with aching joints and soft muscles. She could see the ghost of a young girl staring out of the old face. Mrs Gillain looked up suddenly. "Did you know that I used to tell fortunes?" she said. "Not for years now, but I still know how; if you like I can do yours."

"Maybe another time."

The woman nodded her head. "Any time. Just knock."

Janet climbed the stairs and entered her own flat. Catching her reflection in the mirror over the bureau she pushed back her dark brown hair and examined her reddened face. Thirty four years, as any other woman would count it, and each of those years seemed to be clearly stamped upon her. There was no way to claim any of them back. She made a wry face at herself as she turned away. Her hip banged against the bureau and toppled a jar that rested near the edge.

As the jar fell Janet reached out and managed to catch it by the tips of her fingers. She smiled at it hanging there in her uncertain grip – then the jar was toppling from the bureau, just as it had before, and Janet caught it again. She smiled in exactly the same way, but this time she put the jar back in its place. Such little tricks were one of the joys of playing with time. Janet took a certain pleasure in being able to step back any number of seconds, up to one minute, and replay or alter the things that had occurred. Within that minute she could run

any section over and over again, but she could never go beyond the minute and at the end of it everything returned to normal. If she had missed the falling jar she would have simply had to clean up the mess. It was a sealed world where nothing ever really changed.

That frustrated her. That and the fact that she had never met anyone else with the same ability. She often wondered whether a group of similar people existed. While she walked alone in the world, did they gather together in a hidden moment in time? Sometimes it seemed likely, but though she occasionally alluded to her strange gift and once even put it forward as a piece of fiction, nobody had ever taken her up on it. As far as she was concerned there was nobody out there.

Janet noticed the postcard addressed to her mother, written two days previous and still unposted. "A stamp," she said, picking up the card. She left the shaded, silent room and made her way downstairs. As she stepped out into the sunshine, Janet held the instant when its warmth caressed her face. She moved back in time one second and as the shower of light breathed upon her she closed her eyes, worshipping the power of the universe. A single second flickered and the light tingled her skin again and again in a long moment of delight. Then she stepped forward into time's flow once more. It all happened without pause for the people passing by, but Janet had seen them all halted, trapped in that second of non-time.

The streets seemed calm that day; there was no clamour to get anywhere and Janet made her way easily through the crowd. Soon her shoes crunched the cinder path at the entrance to the park and she glanced toward the post office on the far side. She saw a young man talking to a woman in the distance, but as Janet caught sight of him he turned and walked out the exit. Fancying a better look at him she jumped back a few seconds in time. She stared in disbelief as he turned and looked toward her.

On the seafront Colin Oldman wiped the sweat from his brow and slowed his pace. He came to a halt a little way from the steps leading down into the water. "Hey, stop that!" called an attendant as three boys began to upend a row of folding chairs.

"Waaugh!" A wailing child wandered by as balloons bobbed on lengths of string beyond her reach; cars honked their horns at careless pedestrians spilling out from the main walkway. Oldman watched the traffic. The dark thoughts filling his mind formed part of his reason for trailing after Kinnison, who stood waiting to cross the busy road – the payment to come later was another major factor.

Kinnison was wearing a light shirt and trousers, smart shoes. A business manager on holiday. Oldman was more youthful, more casual in his manner and appearance; a different kind of smart.

The traffic was held up for a moment, Kinnison crossed the road and Oldman followed at a leisurely pace. He was enjoying himself, happy with the life he had carved out at an early age, having made his name as a dealer in information on the tough streets of several big cities. Being able to find out the combination of a safe full of valuables was quite an asset. If someone needed details of security arrangements, codes or timetables, he could supply them to order. Nothing big; just enough to provide a comfortable, easy living.

The street ahead was empty and Oldman quickly closed the gap on his quarry. He scratched behind his ear in a self-conscious gesture of pleasure and hurried on past Kinnison. One minute later he concentrated carefully on that moment.

And found himself once more walking past Kinnison. This time he drew the knife from the sheath on his belt and grabbed hold of the man roughly, pushing him against the wall. "You've got less than a minute to give me an answer," said Oldman as he dug the tip of the blade into Kinnison's flesh, just beneath the top of the jaw, and asked his question. Blood began to ease out around the knife. "I won't stop until you talk." There was no doubting those words and the information came quickly.

Suddenly Oldman was walking along the street ahead of Kinnison, who continued to amble along, unaware that he had given anything away. Colin Oldman smiled and patted the bloodless knife on his belt. As far as any test could prove, it had never been used. Not even to clean his fingernails.

Turning left along the main thoroughfare he took a short cut through the park, thinking about a real vacation once he was paid. "Excuse me," someone said and Oldman looked up in surprise at the woman blocking his path. "Can you give me some directions, I've walked through here a dozen times already and I just can't find my bearings. I'm not sure which one of these streets I'm supposed to take."

"I'm a tourist," said Oldman. "I can't help you." He walked out onto the street just as at the other end of the park Janet jumped back in time.

Janet stared in amazement as the man ignored the woman and glanced over his shoulder in confusion. Then the end of the minute came round and the man disappeared as everything returned to normal. A flicker of hope began inside her and Janet desperately returned to the beginning of the moment. The man turned and looked around. He paused to think then shook his head as the woman tried to talk to him again. Janet's heart raced as he walked from the park and she jumped back to the beginning of the minute.

Everything was as it had originally been, the man spoke to the woman and then walked away. Janet re-ran the scene. The man went through the same motions, refusing to acknowledge that anything unusual was happening. Though she went back to the scene again and again it never altered.

Janet's mind raced as she considered her ability in a new light. She now had proof that another person was capable of manipulating time independently; but how would it work? Perhaps they were each taking a small section of the world into an alternate reality; a sidestep into another dimension, where time had different rules? Janet imagined everything she perceived being dragged up off the Earth, as though she held a long strand of rubber which snapped back into place when she let go of the minute. And this man – she saw determination in his stride as he stepped out of the park, but she brought him back inside easily – he was the same as her.

Then why was he running away? It made no sense. The

idea returned of a group of people who could play with time and create their own lives, remaining submerged in one minute for years on end. "I want to join you!" Janet called out to the man, but though others turned to look, he merely spoke to the woman and walked out of the park. She could hold him there for an eternity, or until he gave in, but Janet knew that the man had as much time as she had, and an eternity was nothing in the end.

"Damn you!" she cried. Returning to the beginning of the minute she began to run toward the man as he stepped determinedly out of the park.

Time rushed through her body, through her mind, manipulating her now. As she ran she was conscious that it was time she wanted to grasp, wanted to drag from her shoulders and mould to her own desires. She ran as hard as she could, past startled people who turned to watch as she rushed toward the embodiment of her hope. He was hurrying away and Janet knew time's ravenous jaws were all around her.

Emerging from the park she looked around frantically at the people hurrying by. In the distance a man glanced quickly over his shoulder. Was that him? she wondered, but the hair was too dark, the body too stocky. She let him fade into the crowd. Returning to the moment when she emerged onto the street Janet once more surveyed the clamour of people. There was no sign of him.

The dull ache of depression hit her then as she turned towards her flat. She had discovered a man who lived as she did, a man she had never seen before, who knew nothing about her, and yet she had seen him run as if she were the devil out to steal his soul. What did he fear? Who did he think she was?

She climbed the stairs to her room and went through to the bedroom where she lay down. Locking herself up inside a minute she filled her head with questions, overlapped by wild hopes and fantasies. Over and over, the scene in the park ran through her mind. After a while she noticed the postcard still clutched in her hand and became aware of the habit she had fallen back into.

Far too often Janet had ended up locked outside of the world, trying to keep her scrambled rushes of emotion from eating away her life. Without her gift of time she would have spent so many hours staring darkly into empty space.

"You can't cope with anything, can you?" Her mother's words haunted her. "You always expect things to go your way, and when they don't you can't cope."

It was true. Unless she kept a tight rein on herself she became frantic about everything. Over the years she had learned to relax, to shut herself down and descend into the calm world of spiritual contemplation, and thus was able to confront the realities she had to face. Lying on the bed, she experienced all the doubt and fears that her discipline should have banished.

Janet began to weary of her thoughts. She took two sleeping tablets, closed her eyes and slowly drifted off to sleep.

The town altered gear and moved toward the beginnings of its nightlife. The sun still cast a faint glow but the moon could be seen as a pale disc high above the streets. Colin Oldman sat hunched forward in the living room of the holiday flat, fear disturbing a balance maintained for most of his life. He had always felt secure with his gift, able to confront anybody without any thought of consequences. It was the secret of his success and the source of all that he enjoyed most in life.

Now he was hiding from a woman capable of her own manipulation of time, and he wondered how far her power extended. She had after all been able to take him back in time with her, turn the minute again and again so he had been trapped. He was only free because she had released him from that moment and he had run away from the park.

He had not run so fast and so hard since he was a child, and back then he only ran for the joy of it. In those days he had been all but fearless, always knowing how far to push people and who was to be avoided at all costs. Inside a single minute of time he took revenge upon the bullies and accosted the girls, learning all their fears and weaknesses. If he discovered things his victims did not really know about themselves then he taught them in his harsh and hateful fashion.

Of course he had expected somebody to come down on him eventually for his cruel exploits. He had imagined the threat constantly at his shoulder, but nothing had happened. There had been no great authoritarian to stamp on his deeds. Realising he was free, he had begun to enjoy himself to the heights of depravity.

But now someone had found him out.

Who is she? he asked himself. Death. He could feel himself shaking at the idea. Was she some sort of overseer set on dealing out punishment? There was only one idea in his mind as he paced the room. He had never actually killed anyone in his life. It had never been necessary; the threat had always been enough before. The deliberate ending of someone's life in the real world was a difficult task and he knew he could not afford to make mistakes. The knife was at his side.

By the time he stepped back onto the street, Oldman had given much thought to his next move. He now felt more positive of his own capabilities as he strolled along; perhaps he would meet the woman on the street and solve the whole thing immediately. The world would once more revolve to his command and life would take his pace. It was a comforting thought. There were plenty of people wandering around the sleepy seaside town that warm evening and he did not have to walk far before he saw a young woman on her own. Quickening his pace he walked on ahead of her. As he shifted back in time his hand moved down toward the clean, bloodless knife.

Late the next morning Janet began a vivid dream which immersed her in mists and frightening shades of grey. The world turned, reversed and then halted. Uncomprehending eyes stared at her from the mists of a man's face.

"I don't understand what you mean," he told her.

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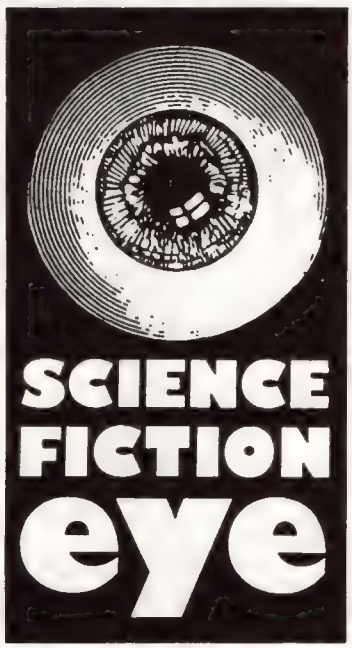

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"I'm juggling you, holding back time so we can get to know each other, but your mind's too limited to get anything out of it. You're tied to the same pattern of thoughts every time I move back. I've brought up a dozen topics since then." She pushed him and he fell from the chair, disappearing from sight.

She jumped back in time, a few seconds. "Can you see me now for what I am, you poor fool? Can't you understand that my time scale has moved on? You sit there experiencing the same thoughts and emotions while I press on, pushing and prodding you, but you can't keep up. You're holding me back and I have to revert to your timescale just to have a conversation. You're stealing my life away from me!"

She saw grass and trees around her. A man in the distance looked over his shoulder as he walked from the park. "Wait!" she cried.

He seemed to be laughing as he disappeared into the crowd.

"No!" She lunged forward, scrabbling over the grass, reaching out to him as she grasped at the seconds of time, pulling them back toward her and suddenly he was there, looking down as she climbed to her feet. "Don't run away from me."

"You're setting a trap," he said, not facing her now.

"A trap?" She laughed. His serious face was half turned away and she liked the line of his jaw, the way he stood there in his light summer clothes, looking into the distance. "I just want to experience this minute with someone who fully understands it."

He turned toward her and she smiled encouragingly, but saw he was laughing, that his laughter was somehow mocking her. "What are you laughing at?" she asked.

"You," he said and she saw how cruel his eyes were. "I'm laughing at you, of course. I'm not going to stay here. I'm running away with your life."

Janet twisted in her sleep, turned over and opened her eyes.

She looked around the bedroom. A wardrobe, a chest of drawers, a window which looked out onto a small seaside town. It was already ten o'clock and the noises around her were the sounds of people at leisure.

As Janet climbed out of bed she realised the idea that had been forming in her head. She was going to spend the day searching this town. Somewhere out there a man was going about his day at a pace of his own choosing, and she was going to find him. She selected jeans to wear with a grey sweat shirt and heeled shoes, tied back her hair and went downstairs.

It was another bright, sunny day and as always Mrs Gillain was sitting in her chair, watching people go by. "Hello, dear," she said. "Isn't it a lovely morning?"

"Yes, it is," replied Janet, and remembered the woman's offer to tell her fortune. Perhaps Mrs Gillain had her own gift. "What type of fortunes do you tell?" she asked. "How do you do it?"

"Palmistry. I used to have a stall at one time and some of the old regulars still come to see me." The sun lit her face as she smiled. "Give me your hand." The old woman took Janet's hand and her brow creased immediately. "I've not had this feeling for so many years," said Mrs Gillain, gazing into the distance. "There's a man. You must find him – not for what he's done but what he'll do in time. I think that's right, I'm not really sure. There's something not right here." Janet's hand slipped from between hers. "You're not a daydreamer, you really are from another world."

Janet shook her head. "No. I don't think so. Really." She backed to the gate and stepped onto the street. Mrs Gillain stared after her as she hurried toward the seafront.

The sea was calm and the sky cloudless. Janet wandered along the seafront where numerous hotels offered lodgings. The maze of streets seemed daunting but she was determined to concentrate on her search and not let Mrs Gillain's words bother her. She headed up to the train station, over to the bus station and the car parks, all the while surveying streets filling up with strangers. The day wore on and she looked into public houses and cafes, visited amusement parks and shops.

Phantoms. Was that all she would ever meet in this world? As the old woman had guessed, nothing seemed real to her. Everywhere, people were being dragged through their lives, unable to hold still for a moment. There they were, hurrying around her, hindering her search, in their blind panic to see and be part of whatever was important to them right then.

Get out of my way, she thought; but all the while she knew how ridiculous her search was. Even in a small town, one person could so easily be always in the wrong place. If she were a detective she would have clues, perhaps a photograph she could show to people as she hunted her man down. She had no pattern to follow, no information. All she had was her memory, which contained a bright, clear image of his face. It was not enough.

Tired and disheartened she stopped at a cafe. She was a long way from the seafront, having detoured down many side streets, and the place was unfamiliar to her.

"Can I have ..." She hardly knew what to ask for. She looked at the counter, chose sandwiches and coffee, and took them over to the window seat.

It was over. The man had gone and she knew she was back to searching for the right moment when she would cut herself off from the world. It had always been her destiny and the thought of it was stronger than ever.

I have no place here, she thought. I never did have. Mrs Gillain thinks I'm from another world and I wish I was. I wish I had somewhere to go where everyone had my ability; but what kind of world would it be? A world that never moved forward. Doesn't that show how ridiculous my life is? she asked herself. Is there nothing here for me?

Janet glanced across the street and felt a moment of panic. There, sitting on a bench, was the man from the park. He looked quite content and Janet imagined that he had hardly thought of her since he left the park the day before. She averted her face but her eyes wandered back to watch him. He was looking out of the corner of his eye at the young woman sitting at the other end of the bench. The street

seemed to waver then, as if it had become unfocused, and Janet felt a pull at her senses. She noticed the way the woman had abruptly changed her position and realised the man had moved back in time. Her own proximity had dragged her with him. She watched then in horror as the man lunged toward the woman, a knife gripped in his hand. Janet screamed as the dress slit open and the knife cut through the material and the flesh together, sinking deep. Janet thought she heard the frenzied cry of the woman but it might have only been her own. Others in the cafe stared out the window. Nobody seemed to move. They watched the blood and the contorted face as the knife was wrenched upwards. Then Janet stopped screaming. She saw the man sitting on the bench, the woman sitting at the other end, and the look of satisfaction that possessed him. He had enjoyed it. He had slipped back in time and taken pleasure in stabbing the woman next to him. Janet watched him with dull, uncomprehending eyes. What kind of animal was it she had been dreaming about? He was smiling as he stood up and and glanced toward the cafe.

A sudden fascination held Janet then and she stared at the impassioned face looking directly at her. In his eyes she saw fear, utter terror at the sight of her. Then the man turned and ran.

Yes, I saw you, she thought. I know what you are. But as she looked around the cafe and saw everyone going about their business, unaffected by the event she had seen, she realised there was nothing she could do. The man had committed no crime, done no wrong in this world, that anyone knew of. I'm helpless, she thought, and he can do whatever he wants. Then it struck her. If he catches me and uses his knife within the minute I'll be aware of it always; he can torture me forever and I will see him coming at me again and again. Her thoughts became frantic. I have to get home. To my own home, away from here!

The woman on the bench looked up as Oldman sprinted away. He was helpless in his fear, frantic to avoid being caught in a moment of time by the woman who had stared at him so coldly from the cafe. She had seemed so possessed; upright and taut. The power was evident, she was playing cat and mouse with him.

He blundered down the street, pushing a young couple out of the way. How far would he be allowed to run? Maybe he was out of her range already. He came to a halt down a side street and tried to catch his breath.

A sob welled up and turned into a terrifying laugh as he leaned back against the wall and breathed hard. No more playing with time, he decided. As a stranger among a crowd of tourists he would not be noticed and an apparently motiveless slaying would be difficult to solve, even if someone actually saw him committing the crime. He had seen the shocked faces of enough witnesses while testing the murder plan. Their eyes had been on the knife, the screaming woman, the blood. No one would remember him clearly. He simply had to catch this woman off guard, then he would show her who was cat and who was mouse.

Oldman stood up straight and calmly set off down the street.

Janet stepped from the cafe and quickly crossed the road. Though the woman was gone from the bench and there was nobody in sight, she felt certain she was being watched. Where was the comfort in playing with time now? she asked herself. She quickened her pace, cursing inwardly as her shoes clacked loudly. The street seemed quiet and peaceful but for Janet it ran with blood. She tensed with shock when a drop of water struck her eyebrow and fell to her cheek. Wiping it away she looked for clouds and spotted water dripping from a balcony above. Somebody leaned forward and looked down as she hurried on.

Left or right? She was not sure. These streets were hardly familiar to her. She saw somebody in the distance, down the side street to the left, and moved purposefully in that direction, eager to be in sight of someone. The man ahead ambled along and Janet felt her heart racing, legs weak, ready to buckle under her as she closed on him. The man stopped and turned.

Janet looked at his face and noted only a look of confusion as she walked past him. She slowed, feeling uncertain as he began to head back in the direction he had come. Pausing at the corner of the street, she glanced over her shoulder and was about to turn and head back that way when she felt a sharp blade pierce the base of her neck and sink deep. Her throat gurgled in a thwarted cry and her voice was dead as she looked into Oldman's brightly gleaming eyes. He grabbed at her, trying to drag her down. She twisted round and he lost his grip on the knife, but she felt herself drifting back toward him in a haze; his face came close to hers, then instinct took hold and she moved back in time.

She was walking slowly toward the corner of the street and the footsteps of the man behind her were retreating. Ahead of her waited the man with the knife which would pierce her neck should she ever let the minute end. Janet stepped into a shaft of bright sunlight, turned to face it and sat down on the floor.

This is the moment I have been looking for, she realised. Her face was calm, peaceful as she set time back one second. Over and over again she ran a single second, and everything was halted around her as her mind steadily focused inward or perhaps outward to a place that no one else could ever hope to contemplate with such consideration. I no longer exist in the old world and never will again, she told herself, knowing she had found a purpose.

For as long as I live I will be the jailor of my murderer. ❑

This is Alan Garside's first story for **BBR**, though he is already widely known in the NSFA. His stories have appeared in *Works*, *The Scanner* and *Nova SF*, and he is a frequent contributor to *Strange Adventures*. Alan lives in Stockport, near Manchester.

StrAW Acid pusshoney

title selected by 'Junior' animal interplay .777. Ta. 'Porcupine'... thanks Andy.

I STRIVED. REALLY REALLY STRIVED. I STRIVED SO HARD. SO HARD. SO HARD.

I TRIED TO BETTER HUMAN LIFE AND CULTURE. I TRIED INVENTING THINGS TO HELP MAN.

I TRIED MY HAND AT WRITING. I HOPED MAN MIGHT APPRECIATE THE FINER POINTS OF THE HUMAN CONDITION AND.... MOREOVER, MY GENIUS.

DESPERATELY NEED A MEDIA TO PUT DOWN MY KSERBERNESS.

SOME SHAKESPEARIAN SCHOLARS SAY...

BLOODORANGE #6

FICTION BY: P.F. LEWIS ETC

ART BY: KEV CULLEN ETC.

+ 'PORCUPINE'

I PAID THE EDITOR OF BLOODORANGE £200 TO PUBLISH 'PORCUPINE'. HE DID. THREE WEEKS LATER I WAS SHOT IN THE BACK AND LEGS BY SOMEONE WHO GOT UPSET WITH IT. SHOT FOR TRYING. NEARLY KILLED ACTUALLY. I KNEW THEN I WAS DAMNED. I WISH I WAS BORN NORMAL. ANONYMOUS. I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW HOW MAN PROTECTS GENIUS.

PORCUPINE.

PALE FLESH GLOWS UNDER THE SPIDERY TOUCH OF FRAGILE SEX.

'NO MORE' HE SIGHS, 'PLEASE?'

SHE STARES ASTONISHED. BLACK HOLLOW EYES OF EROTIC PAIN.

'BUT YOU MUST LEARN!'

THE THIN SLIVERS OF STEEL THAT PROTRUDE FROM EVERY PORE IN HER BODY TINGLE WITH ANTICIPATION. PLEASURE CONDUCTORS.

TONIGHT SHE IS THE PORCUPINE.

'I KNOW ALL THERE IS' HE SNARLS.

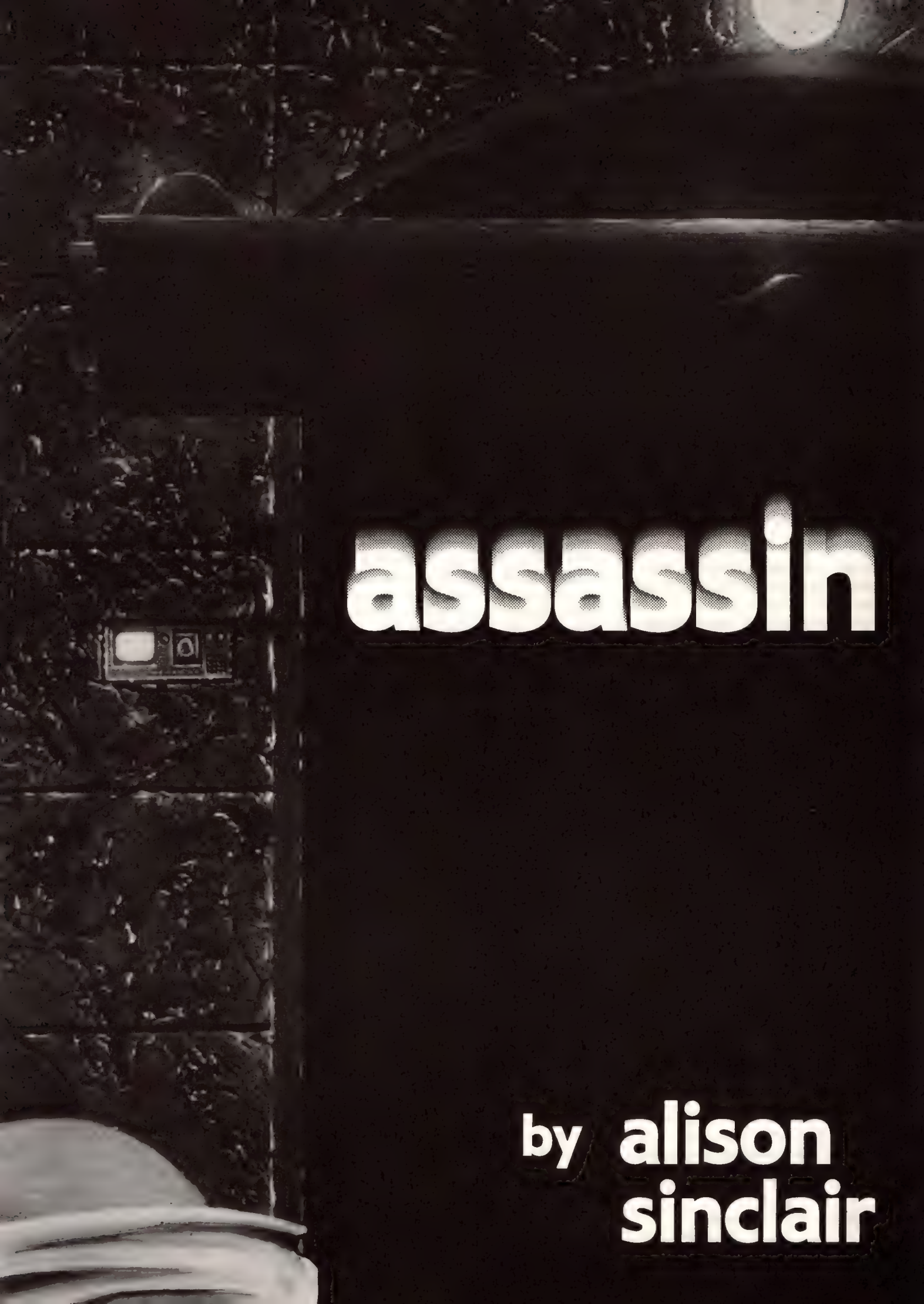
'UNTRUE... THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING' SHE REPLIES

SHE SLIPS THE BARREL OF A GUN INTO HIS ANUS.

A SMILE.

'WANNA SHOOT YOUR LOAD?'

Paul



assassin

by alison sinclair

assassin

alison sinclair

"I think I've got an assassin," Glad greeted me when I arrived at the precinct that Wednesday morning. I was tempted to say not before it got me, but I didn't.

Glad was pleased with herself: the mood beads in her crinkled black hair pulsed yellow and green. I leaned over her shoulder and murmured, "Is that avaricious yellow, I see?" She gave me her wide-mouthed grin. The beads sparkled with the swirling blue and white of amusement overlaid with friendship, overlaid with a shimmer of lust.

"Keep your mind on your work, and off your layover," I advised.

"Shit," said Glad, and reached up beneath her hair and popped the connection between sensors and microprocessor. The beads faded to dull lilac but her blush glowed. I pretended not to notice. "What have you got?"

What she had was a stub of code with enough path info to tell her which neuronode was being addressed. "Moodnode," she said.

"Source?"

"A PC."

"Bootleg," I said. "Downloaded from one of the Joynets. Let their security handle it."

"Coroner's office sent it over," Glad said quietly. "Woman took a header off a balcony. Not much left of her headware, so they checked out her PC. Last week it'd have been suicide; this week they've got cadets –"

"Don't remind me." One of ours had locked up our system twice already.

"And some bright pixel thought this was suspicious. Strangely enough he's right. This wasn't chewed up by the user's endonucleases; ends aren't right."

"I take your word for it."

She sighed profoundly. One of the things I like about Glad is she doesn't rely on beads to communicate for her.

"This isn't any one of the user's – she had nine."

"Nine ... paranoia rules."

"Even paranoids have enemies ... And it isn't a Thrillnet one; I've got the system checking the other nets she accessed – she was heavily into it, FantasyNets, ThrillNets, JoyNets, LoveNets – those I can get any info on. We've got to do something about those bastards."

"They won't admit their security isn't perfect. Lose customer confidence."

"On the ThrillNets? They're not into safety; I'd be hard put to tell the difference between a virus and some legit ThrillWare."

Ouch, I thought. "I still don't see why you think it's an assassin and not just an odd bit of bootleg code."

"Because –" then she sighed. "Just a gut feeling. One, it's addressed to the mood circuits. Two, it isn't the fragment you'd expect for a legit program chewed up by the perscom programs or the nets. Three, it's off a suicide. I've sent out for records from other suicides –"

"Kiss off your social life for the next century."

"Give me some credit, Mouse. I'm looking for unexplained suicides of people with active mood implants."

"You think such a creature exists. People don't go for mood mod and synthesis because they're happy with their lives and want to get happier –" No, I thought, let's leave that. "So what you think is that the assassin fed our lady downer, and she jumped."

"Or upper. Send the correct set of overrides to a mood implant, and bang, instant florid schizophrenia. She may have thought she was a bird. Or the room was on fire. Or God was telling her she was an angel ... Whatever."

"I'm surprised," I said, after a moment, "you found it."

"So am I. Somebody's been careless, or there was some inhibitor in this PC's system."

"Well, live right and maybe the dAIty'll smile on you."

Glad and I lunched in The Caverns, the developer's answer to city-center space limitation, five levels, going down. We patronize a salad joint called *Charon's on the Styx* – wonderful soup, don't ask where they grow the greens. Over salad and soup we talked about life, the universe, men and everything. Glad had met someone new; or someone else, anyway. Everything she said fitted a pattern; it wasn't going to last. Glad knew how to pick them for a short good time and no lasting regrets. I envied her. My layover, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, had been one long argument, latest installment of an even longer argument. Errel had become convinced he was missing out, career-wise, relationshipwise – he wanted to have input nodes implanted, mood and memory nodes. Fine; it was his brain and his bank account. But he wanted me along. He talked about our relationship; I talked about my work. I knew I wasn't telling him the truth and I had the feeling he wasn't telling me everything, so it went round and round.

"The latest," I told Glad, "is that now he's started talking about changing his name back to Joshua, and going home for a visit." I pushed a slice of tomato to the side of the plate: the backlighting in *Charon's on the Styx* picked up a faintly iridescent, unhealthy sheen on its skin. Probably badly washed. Glad's eyes and teeth flashed purple-white.

"Home as in West."

"That's right. Talks about his parents getting older. Mellowing. I bit my tongue. Nothing he's ever said to me suggested they'd be the type to mellow. The only way he'd get back – or halfway back – would be by casting himself as cautionary parable for the rest of his life."

"What about the girl he was supposed to have married?"

"Happily married, he understands. The innocent wonders how she can have any grudge."

Glad nodded understanding. Sarah was the girl Errel who was Joshua was to have married, at the age of seventeen, until he glimpsed before him a life like his father's and grandfather's and great-grandfather's ... fifty, sixty, seventy years in a time-slipped enclave, punishing,

denying, mortifying his curiosity. But even that he could have endured, he said, if he had not also seen himself in twelve years time laying righteous punishment on the back of a daughter or son into whom he had bred that curiosity. And so he had left a letter to his intended bride in the roadside postbox, amongst the letters of congratulation and best wishes, walked sixteen miles to the nearest monorail station, and with some of the money that should have started their married life, bought a one-way rail ticket to the nearest city large enough to lose himself in.

If she were happy now, I thought, she might forgive the marriage that had not happened, but what she would not forgive, I was sure, was what had happened, the humiliation, the weeks of hearing the story being told in whispers just out of her hearing.

"Hell hath no fury," Glad commented, sharing my thought. "That doesn't go with his itch to be wired. What's brought this on?"

"I wish I knew. He says it's got to do with work, but farmer's advocacy he can do as well unwired as wired, and the people he's doing it for trust him more for it. He's said it himself."

"Got his eye on another job?"

"Not that I know."

"Do you think he'd stay out West?"

"Not under their conditions."

"Yeah, I know how he feels," Glad said. "I mean, Naturalists aren't as fanatical as some of the religious sects, but I'm always aware of having to screen everything just before I say it. And still I resent them a little for the fantasy world they live in, their choice, and giving me none – I mean, even my name, for Christ's sake. Galadriel." She sighed. "All the accommodation seems to have to be on my side. But I wouldn't be without them. I know how he feels."

I, I thought, do not. But perhaps that is because all the emotion in me designated for parents is directed towards, concentrated on, the suddenly frail, suddenly old man in a ward at Beth Israel. "Are we going to see D'Inde tonight?"

"Of course. It's Wednesday."

I arrived home later than usual, and found Errel lighting up the inside of the hall with anger and impatience. I hadn't seen this particular headdress before; it looked spiky and mildly barbaric.

I said, "Before you start, this is Wednesday, and on Wednesdays I go and visit the Old Man when I get done."

"You couldn't bring yourself to make an exception just this once. I did ask."

"And I said no," I said, and pushed past him, into our bedroom.

"Particularly not for my friends," he said, following. "You've made it abundantly clear you weren't interested in going."

With me and you and a bed for two, the air was getting squashed. "Errel, just let me get dressed."

"You call that dressed," as I lifted down my thermocolour pantsuit from its bin.

"Yes, I call it dressed." I laid it down, and sat beside it on the bed. I was not going to strip with him in the room in this mood; it felt too much like nakedness. "Maybe it's not chic amongst the banking set, but I'm not amongst the banking set; I'm just your arm accessory for the evening."

"Les," he changed tack, "Lester, just do it for me. Wear your lights."

"I do not feel like wearing my lights in a roomful of strangers. Particularly after this afternoon."

"The Old Man?"

That *Old Man* made me set my teeth. One of the reasons we had come to be in this room together was Errel had always had exquisite judgment in the taking of liberties. Lately, though, his judgment seemed to have coarsened. Or maybe I was just oversensitive; even his squad used to call D'Inde 'The Old Man'.

The problem was, then it had been a joke, and now it wasn't.

I put a hand down on my pantsuit leg, and watched an aura of blue grow around it, as my body heat reached it.

"Every time I go there I have to hold back from hitting the therapist who burbles on about how much they've been able to do for him. All I can think about is the D'Inde I knew wouldn't have let them wire up his brain."

The blue developed a slight tinge of green around my fingers and palm.

"He'd have preferred to have been a vegetable? Or dead?"

"How should I know?" People who picked up that I wasn't thrilled at the miracles of modern medical technology kept asking me that. I didn't have an answer. The only person who could answer that was a man who no longer was. The green became a distinct band, within the blue.

"One of the worst things about it all," I heard myself say, "is purely selfish. That man knew things about me that aren't even on record, that don't even exist in any form other than in my memory and in his. Now that's gone, because they can only give him back what's on record. I feel as though part of me has vanished along with part of him."

Like the person I used to be, before I became Lester.

"Well," Errel said, sliding his hand down my shoulder, "maybe some day you'll want to tell someone else these things."

I did not know whether to let myself melt or be furious; to avoid the decision, I stood up and returned the thermosuit to its bin and pulled down a plain black catsuit and mood-bead veil, small but pricey, because of the EEG circuitry. I saw Errel's smile framed by indigo. "You are down," he said, softly.

"I told you I was," I said, unable to prevent myself from stressing *told*.

"No, don't take them off," he said. "I want to apologise, and I'd like to see – if it takes."

"We used to be able to do that without light-effects."

"We thought we did," he said. "I've had the feeling that maybe we were – maybe we didn't understand each other as well as we thought."

I kept my eyes on his face, not on the slivers of yellow crowning his head.

"What do you mean?"

"Les, I've always wanted to know what I missed; I thought you understood that."

"I get 'planted, I go on the Nets, I can't work Virus-squad any more."

"We don't have to go on the Nets."

"You'll want to know what comes next, won't you?" I was distracted by a colour change at my peripheral vision, green changing to yellow, on its way to red, if I were not so – so what? The beads could only indicate simple emotion, and mine were anything but. The yellow fixed, and I watched his eyes shift from

one side to the other, waiting for them to change, and then reached up and yanked the whole apparatus off. "Now watch my face," I told him. "And listen: I'll tell you what I feel. I'm wondering what happened to the man who moved in with me, because I don't think it has anything to do with proper understandings or not. I'm not standing in the way of your getting yourself implanted, but don't pressure me to follow and make out that our relationship will be nothing if we can't see each others' moods in lights and couple through a computer. I think it's been good between us, and I'd like to keep thinking it's been good, so leave if it's not enough, but don't try and trample my memories on the way out!"

"If it's your work –"

"It's not my work," I said, before I thought better of it, but I'd got so far into the habit of being truthful with this man that I'd only just started not regretting the things I hadn't told him. Fortunately he was not listening.

"Forces in Chicago and L.A. interface; they've got security circuits nobody could touch. This is a backwater here – but things could change, if people like you stop resisting –"

"People like me."

"D'Inde's people. He's been the fanatic about keeping cops clear of the interface. Now he's gone – I'm sorry, Lester, but he's gone; I know you loved the Old Man – he was your mentor and father figure, but he's gone, and the situation he based his opinion on is history, and when people's opinions are based on history, they just become prejudice."

"Not prejudice," I said, suddenly exhausted. "We're investigating a suicide – possible assassin virus. Something came through the ThrillNets, scrambled this woman's implants, and she took a dive off her balcony. Maybe she's not the only one."

And then I was very glad that my net of beads hung dimly in my hand, for I surely would have responded to what I saw in his. Just for an instant they turned white, under powerful emotion – fear? anger? – and then back to yellow. His face showed nothing; quite possibly he did not know what had happened.

"Who's on it?" he said. "Who picked it up?"

But for that flash I would have told him it was Glad. "Somebody new; a real bright pixel. Jepthe Levin. You'll be hearing about him."

He smiled. "I'd watch your back, then."

Glad called me in to an interview booth on Friday – soundproofed, screened and monitored.

"We've known each other a long time," she began, seeming at a loss. She was beadless; her face was strained, looking down at interlocked hands which pulled against each other. "If it had been anyone else but you, I wouldn't be doing this, but we've worked together and we're friends, and maybe there is another explanation –" She stopped, gathering herself.

"Remember you asked about the assassin and I told you I had nothing; I was lying –" another deep breath, "until I could decide what to do. Then I thought there are two people who could use that node, and if it weren't you, you had to be warned. And then I started checking into your records more closely, and I didn't know what to think –"

"You've left out something I need to know before this makes sense."

She glanced at me again. Finding me too calm, I thought.

"Oh." She said, "Yes – I think I found the thread for the assassin, and traced it back. One of the originating nodes was your home PC."

On actually hearing it, I felt much less surprised, and much sicker than I thought I would. The sickness showing in my face made Glad relax slightly.

"You said 'one'," I said after a while.

"I haven't – I haven't traced the others back yet. I've been distracted. I've been looking into your records."

She paused, significantly, watching me.

I took it straight: "I hope you appreciate art. The Chief and I spent days on those records." She stared. "Try the name Julie Beaumont for the other half of the story. Don't take the date of death as literal."

"How about you tell me?" The cop again.

"I'm probably going to have forgotten details. It's been almost twenty years, and I wasn't in very good shape, then." Glad's face hardened slightly. I didn't care; it might be an excuse for discrepancies between what I told her and what the records showed, but she should appreciate what one could do with records from what D'Inde and I had done.

"Julie Beaumont was Juvenile S. in the case trials that restricted mood implants into juveniles; you'll remember that case."

She nodded.

"I was Julie Beaumont."

I'd said that more for effect than anything, but immediately saw that Glad had not until that moment realized the connection. She stared at me. "But –" I waited. She threw herself back into her chair and whistled through her teeth. "Now there's something *I* need to know to make sense of this."

"Alright. Julie Beaumont: fourteen years old, gifted and underprivileged; a troublemaker. School is understaffed and overcrowded, parents overextended with a disabled child needing ongoing therapy. Mood circuits are ideal for cases like this, the psychiatrists say. Quite cost effective, can be monitored through computer. Implants for a couple of years, until the upheavals of adolescence are over. Everything goes swimmingly until Juvenile S. meets an older man who logs her onto a ThrillNet." And suddenly I am no longer narrating, but remembering. Remembering him telling me what a lucky girl I was, and here's how to bribe the policeman. Feeling hands tickling the back of my neck where only the doctors' touched before. Feeling the little thud in the skull as the lead went in. And then – there aren't words for it. Pleasure beyond description. I used up most of his allotment for the month, he said, while he simply sat and stared at my face. He'd never seen a human being look so happy. It made him feel strange, he said; made him understand that trying to make someone happy could be more than just an expected gesture with an expected return.

"Nowadays, after the controversy over her case – and others – therapeutic implants are metered; nowadays this couldn't happen, or so they say. Because she was poor and gifted and resentful she had learned how to tap into nets. The thrill of doing, of pitting her skill and intelligence against the minds of the privileged – almost as good as any high from the Nets.

"But her understanding of neurochemistry was nil. She did not appreciate feedback mechanisms, that over-stimulated circuits become less sensitive,

understimulated ones more so. Classic addiction, complete with withdrawal. She needs the nets to live. But depression impairs performance, impairs her ability to break in. One day after six hours of nothing, she cuts open her wrists instead."

Glad was watching me silently, appalled. And I realized that if it were anyone else's story, my rendition would be appalling. The last part of the story, the part nobody knew, I told in my own voice: "There was a man there while I was recovering. I thought he was a psychiatrist and told him to go to Hell and I'd see him there. But he wasn't; he was a policeman. I asked if he was going to arrest me, and he said, probably not. He put me in my place by telling me bedtime stories about larceny, extortion, murder, terrorism; the great crime syndicates and families – until the medics put a stop to it. I'll give those medics this much, they tidied up my neurochemistry nicely. It didn't hurt of course that after all the publicity there was all kinds of money suddenly available to pay for a prolonged course of pharmotherapy. Of course they didn't want their lovely work spoiled by some policeman who wasn't going to charge me but kept coming back. So one day he didn't come and I went home all ready for a fresh start, to get out of my grim surroundings the dull, honest way. Then I started going for college interviews. Getting asked when I was planning on implants ... Being told: about curricula being upgraded to utilize the ability to interface with databanks, about most professional jobs requiring basic implants, about loan schemes available as part of the total educational loan package ... money need be no object. I'd smile at that; it was the only thing I could find to smile at. You'll know."

"I know," Glad said, quietly, eyes on my face.

"No reputable surgeon would touch me, with my history; back then there was better than even chance I'd reject. Their faces'd change, and they'd say, very sorry, but –" Glad nodded. "I started small – hacking into college systems and making a minor nuisance of myself. Say dropping the first digit from file identifiers at random ... I'd make a round of public terminals – those tenner-fed ones they used to have – so I couldn't be traced. Then after a particularly degrading interview I turned an endocodase loose in that system."

Glad whistled.

"Next day I had a summons from D'Inde. I went along through sheer bravado and a determination to spit in somebody's face for the last time. By the time I left he'd offered me a job. He could see the interface virus problem arising – criminal and terrorist attacks directly through interfaces, and wanted to set up a unit of people who would be immune – because they weren't interfaced; keyboard and mouse people. I had the talent, and I was implant-proof. Problem was there was no way someone with my history would be approved with central. Julie Beaumont had to go."

Glad said, "He took a big chance on you."

"Oh," I said, "not really. He was a better psychologist than any of the professionals. He knew what I needed, and made sure I got it until I grew up enough not to need it."

"Les, with that history –"

"Surely you can't believe I would be so clumsy as to use my home terminal – or, after all these years, start taking out Netters?"

"I could think of two reasons. The Boss and Errel."

I took a deep breath, slowly realizing that my candor had, if anything, cost me.

"What's happened to the Boss, or Errel putting pressure on me to be implanted driving me off the deep end, you mean?"

"Yes," Glad said simply.

"How wonderful it is to have friends who have faith in you," I said, dryly. "Glad, I know something you don't know. I know I didn't do it. And I do not believe Errel would."

"Look, Les, he's sharing the spot for suspect number one, for the same reason. He was brought up as a fundamentalist –"

"Which he rejected –"

"But hasn't he spoken about going back recently?"

"I don't remember telling you that," I returned, very sharply, though I did; I wanted to see how she'd react to a direct challenge. She paused, looked at me, and said, "Lunch, last week."

"Yes," I said, "I did. But I don't see how that pertains. For one thing, Errel's people aren't murderous. Their main concern is to save the souls of their own; as far as they're concerned, God will deal with the rest of us in his own sweet time."

"Has anyone else used your PC?"

I returned stare for stare.

"No."

"And threads are unique to their machine of origin."

I didn't answer.

"So it's either you or Errel."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, alright, I'll accept that. Either Errel or I loaded it. Knowingly or unknowingly."

"Unknowingly – you? Since when was your hygiene that bad?"

"Look," I said. "You're showing a dangerous bias."

"What should I have done? Reported you and had you investigated?"

"By the book, yes. Just – take precautions, Glad. I'm not admitting anything, but don't tell me about them."

She raised both eyebrows, but didn't say anything, so it was up to me to spell it out. "Either I'm responsible, and you will have to contend with me, or I'm not, and if I look into it – as surely you know I will – and I find trouble, that trouble could find its way back to you."

She sorted through all the implications of that. "How long do I give you?"

"Don't tell me that, either."

"Anything I can do to help?"

"No."

When the top brass called me over for an in-person meeting that afternoon to confirm office scuttlebut that I was being touted for D'Inde's job as squad head, I responded with a giggle of suppressed hysteria, which I hope they ascribed to surprise and delight. I did not go back to the squad office afterwards, but walked over to the Beth Israel to look in on D'Inde alone. He hadn't been doing well; I knew from the hospital record I'd hacked into that they had had to implant a pacemaker to control an arythmia, so that along with his brain, his heart was hooked up to the hospital mainframe.

I sat down beside his bed, met his silent eyes, which always looked to me like burned almonds. I was almost used to his shrunken appearance, and the ash overlay on his brown skin, but I still couldn't stand the lost expression in those eyes. I didn't look at him as I talked. I told him about Glad's virus,

about its origin, about my knowledge that I had not done it, and about what that meant. I told him it looked like the man I had lived with for six years – wanting to go home and knowing it was impossible – had begun to kill. Thinking perhaps that he was buying back his innocence, buying his acceptance. I told him that Errel who had been Joshua might have gone mad with his irreconcilable worlds. I told D'Inde I understood how that could happen, and asked him if there was something I did not know, something that could be blinding me. It was like talking to a statue. Except when, at the end, I looked up. Statues do not cry. I knew then what I was going to do.

Searching your own apartment is not easy – you know all the myriad nooks and cubbyholes where things may be hidden – least of all if you do not want to leave a mess that screams: I've been searched! I might as well not have bothered. I picked a lock on the bottom drawer in Errel's desk in our joint 'study' – a cop and a farmer's advocate don't make enough for a three bedroom – pulled it open, and saw a dot of light flash off my thumb as I reached in for the single disc I found there. The high tech equivalent of the old strand of hair. I had until Errel came home, no longer.

I isolated our PC from the nets, took the hard drives off line and loaded the disc. The first thing that came up was a pair of lips, suggestively vertical, outlined in red. It was the last thing I expected. The lips swung round to horizontal, puckered, and in the pucker six silver dots appeared. Password needed – it figured. If I played around with it I might erase the disc; I'd wait for Errel. I considered going on with the search, but I had the feeling that if this were not what I wanted, it could be used as a lever to give me what I wanted. I set the disc aside and reconnected the hard drives, and started working on the other part of my plan.

Errel had the grace to come home late – about twelve thirty. I'd just finished putting on the finishing touches when the intercom buzzed, and I had time to shut down the system and settle down in the living room with the disc on my lap and my gun down between the cushions when he opened the door. The gun down the side of the cushions was the easy part of my set up. But Errel, raised under the eye of an omniscient and unforgiving God, and scarcely less omniscient and unforgiving elders, took one look at the disc as I held it up, and I didn't need mood beads to see shock, guilt and dismay written all over him.

For the second time that day, I almost cried.

"Why?" I said.

"I don't know," he told me, shaking his head very slowly, dazedly. "It's not as though – I haven't been happy with you, and please believe me, Les, I wouldn't endanger what we had. But –" he blinked, "the only thing that comes to me is right out of the Bible – 'She tempted me and I did eat.' Which I know you won't let me off with, and I shouldn't be let off with either. She's beautiful and careless and exciting, and I didn't have – I didn't have the sense to refuse her – even if – even if she hadn't made promises about the help she could give me and the people I work for. I felt guilty the whole time – for what it's worth."

This made no sense to me; he was not defending himself against the charge I had to level. "What about the rest of it?" I demanded, and when he started towards me, said, "No! Stay there."

He stopped, looking bewildered and hurt. I kept my hand over the gun.

"The interfaces, you mean," he said. "She was the one. She said –"

"No," I said. "The viruses."

"What – viruses?"

I looked straight at him. "Are you conning me, Errel?"

"I don't know anything about viruses," he said. "I thought you'd –" he gestured towards the disc, "I thought you'd seen what is on that disc."

"What's on that disc?"

"Letters. Messages. Games – we played."

I wanted to believe him. I stood, knowing that if I were wrong, if he were lying to me, I was taking a risk in getting near him. I don't overestimate my physical prowess against a man. I considered taking the gun, but if he were not lying, if it were only an affair and his being used as a dupe, what we had might be salvageable – without the gun. I left it behind, between the sofa cushions, and walked over to give him the disc.

But I wasn't going to back off on the rest of it.

"Load it," I said quietly, "I want to show you something."

He loaded it; the lips came up, tilted, puckered, and he blushed to the roots of his hair. I took note of the six digit code he typed in, and then commented, in as near to a normal voice as I could muster, "At least it was only outline red. Solid red would have been too tacky."

I wasn't sure I would find what I had been looking for. If I'd written those viruses at leisure I'd have been certain that once sent off, the code would be overwritten. But then I'd have been sure than nothing survived at the other end. Once we were in I initiated a search for a fragment homologous to the one Glad had identified from the suicide. Errel said only, "What are you doing?"

"I'm looking for a bit of code."

Otherwise we did not talk. After three point two four one of the longest minutes of my life, a match flashed up.

"Amateurs," I said.

"What is it?"

"A killer virus," I said. "You've been used by your beautiful, careless, exciting lady as a carrier of a virus that's killed at least one person and possibly more. Have you got any more of these discs?"

"No," he said, numbly. "I – she liked us to pass that one back and forth."

"Figures," I said. "We'll go down to the station. We'll need names, etc. Then once you're cleared –" I couldn't bring myself to say 'if you're cleared', "probably you should take a holiday somewhere. Quiet. Until we've got them. You're about to become an informer."

He did not say anything, made no protest, merely got up and took his coat from the back of the chair where he'd put it. I kicked out the disc and handed it to him, and we went down to the station.

While we were at the station, with Glad, the call came through from the Hospital. D'Inde had just died: a malfunction of his pacemaker, coupled to a temporary breakdown in monitoring equipment. I took care not to be the first to say it was for the best.

I put Errel on a train West a week later, three days after The Old Man's funeral, and walked back from North Station above ground, hands deep in pockets, breath like a cold scarf wrapping itself around my neck. The snow creaked underneath my boots; it was the coldest February on record. I wondered what would happen now. We had Errel's

exciting lady, but she wasn't cooperating; we were in for a spring of long, hard slog. We had three confirmed, five possible victims, and the inklings of something like a motive, from what we'd gleaned from vice and finance about the goings-on in the financial sector, and the loves, hates and rivalries among those high livers. The killings were not random.

I'd never accounted for the flash of white I saw in Errel's beads when I told him about the virus. Could have been an intuition, a sense of unease he would not admit to himself about his lady's morals; but I would prefer to believe it was simple fright at the thought of how close he'd come to getting on those nets, coupled to guilt at the agent of his persuasion. Somehow the finer degrees of his innocence no longer mattered to me. I wondered what he would find when he reached 'home'; I wondered if he would ever be back, or if I'd be here when he came back.

I'd done my best to cover myself, but I hadn't had much time, only nine hours between seeing D'Inde on that Friday afternoon and making my decision, and Errel coming home and putting in that disc on Friday night. I'd kept the code as simple as I could, just the routing and insertion information, and set transmission to coincide with the assassin disk being activated, but I'd had to create two viruses and autodigest instructions in nine hours – and I was out of practice. There was an investigation at the hospital, but large institutions are always hyperaware of adverse publicity, so it had been strictly internal. Their people are not nearly as sharp as D'Inde's – now mine – as Glad, for instance. Sometimes I wonder at the way Glad looks at me, but I may be imagining it, and she hasn't said anything.

I do a lot of wondering, but I regret nothing. ❑

Alison Sinclair currently works as a postdoctoral biochemist at Leeds University. She has another story pending with *The Gate*, and a couple of non-SF pieces have already been published in Canada and the US. When not engaged in biochemistry or writing, Alison practices Aikido and sings for two large choruses.

MOGOLLÓN NEWS

by **UNCLE RIVER**
Our New Mexico Correspondent

A Hot Spell

Photo: Tom McDonald, Western New Mexico University

It has been hot. Not Las Cruces hot. Not even Silver City hot. But for Mogollón, it is hot.

For this reason, Mort Walker has been forced to open up his house to get some air. Only trouble is Mort doesn't like people. His house sits four feet from the street. When he opens it up you can see right in.

Sometimes Mort keeps his back turned and ignores people passing by. Then he gets suspicious and thinks if someone can see him and he doesn't see them that they might do God only knows what.

So he turns around and sits facing the street, glowering nonstop for hours. Worst is when someone waves and smiles. Mort usually just scowls ferociously, but every now and then, he can't stand it any more and leaps up shaking his fist and shouting insults.

Elvira Sonderfeld, on the other hand, is enjoying the tourist traffic. She seems to get more spry every year.

This summer she has decided to sell fresh baked goods and lemonade. She keeps pretty erratic hours. Just opens up when she has a batch of something ready and shuts down when it's gone or she gets tired. (The bears are always ready to clean up any leftovers.) She says she is more interested in meeting people than the business end of it all anyhow.

Elvira is also finally sharing some of her cooking secrets. Not that she was unwilling before, but Gina Mitchell is the first person willing to share Elvira's kitchen with the bears.

No one took Gina very seriously at first. People come and go in Mogollón. Gina lasted her first winter here though, so now folks are regarding her as a genuine resident.

Gina has a job with the Forest Service. She is usually out four days at a stretch, then home four. Her job title is, "Supervisory Staff Assistant IV." Most of the time she counts things.

Sometimes Gina counts the number of people who use a particular trail over a four day period. Sometimes she counts the number of cars that pass a certain point on the road. Sometimes she counts cows or trees or deer. Once she was assigned to count bears. The only ones she saw were Elvira's. She decided not to mention them as they weren't in her assigned district and were anyhow on private property.

Gina still doesn't know what the purpose of her job is. However, she believes it must be important as her reports are sent to the Forest Supervisor, the Regional Office, and sometimes even the National Office in Washington.

She even got a commendation a few weeks ago from a congressman from Ohio. He didn't appear to know what the purpose of her work was either. ✹

The Newt Fisher

Todd Mecklem

We awoke to a clear, cold morning at the lake, and the wine-fog still clung to my head. Dew covered our sleeping-bags. Regretfully, I propelled myself out of the womb and into the stinging mountain air.

Three tiny coals were the only remnants of the previous night's bonfire, but there was still plenty of fuel about. The others didn't rise until I had a fine boil going in the coffee-pot. I walked slowly around them whispering "coffee, coffee, coffee" until they slowly crept out of their burrows, their need for the black liquid overpowering their natural inclination to hide from the cold. I poured my own coffee first.

The tops of the Douglas Firs were already glowing in sunlight, and sharp reflections issued from the water's surface, rippled by a breeze from the ridge above. As we sat enjoying our coffee, miles from the nearest road or town, far even from a trail, I watched for jumping trout. Then I saw the man.

We had thought that we were alone at the lake, and we had seen or heard no-one approaching, but there he was, directly across the lake from us. He was singularly dressed, wearing a long grey cloak, which covered his entire body, with a hood thrown over his head. I couldn't make out his features, but he had a ruddy complexion. He was dangling a string in the water, pulling out newts, and placing them in a sack, which was the same shade of grey as his cloak.

I pointed him out to my friends. We stared at the unexpected visitor for a while, as he single-mindedly fished for newts. J. hallooed several times, but the man didn't even look up.

"He must be deaf," J. observed.

"Or unfriendly," R. said.

"He can't help seeing our smoke," I said. "He must have hiked in while we were still asleep."

We watched him for a while, then devoted our attention to the preparation of breakfast.

We were still in a somewhat ragged state of consciousness, but a feast of pancakes and applesauce, accompanied by liberal mugs of coffee, did wonders for our bodies and psyches. Still, we could not quite be at ease.

"What's he doing now?" asked R., as he whittled twist tobacco into an ancient clay pipe.

"Still pulling out newts," J. replied. "What the hell? Is he gonna use 'em for bait?"

I stared out at the figure. I felt uneasy, and wanted to put some distance between myself and the strange fisher.

"Let's hike up to the tarn," I said, as I scraped the debris from my plate into some nearby bushes. "We'll have lunch up there. We can explore that rockslide we saw yesterday."

R. and J. nodded their assent.

There are no trails to the lake, and the surrounding terrain is steep, and covered with thick Douglas Fir forest and thickets of rhododendron. We used the rhodies to pull ourselves up the slope below the tarn, stopping to rest whenever we came to a relatively level spot, or a large tree-trunk we could rest against.

We reached a nearly-dry creekbed. The stream was choked with branches from recent windstorms, and the chill breeze and absence of mosquitoes reminded me that winter would soon descend on this wild land. The ground we were walking on would be locked beneath thick drifts of snow, and for more than half the year the land would lie dormant. The lake would freeze and disappear beneath the drifts. It was only a matter of weeks, perhaps days, before the first snow would fall.

The tarn was a frying-pan-shaped pond, barely five meters across, and showed signs of having been much larger and deeper earlier in the year. Many fallen branches were partially submerged in the water, which was the color of thick brown tea. Above the tarn was an enormous rockslide, stretching more than a hundred meters up the side of the ridge, which was one mighty arm of Bull-of-the-Woods mountain.

After several hours of climbing and exploring (and some dozing beside sun-warmed boulders), we were sitting beside the tarn, sharing a Petri cigar, when R. suddenly said, "Where did all the newts go?"

We looked all around the edges of the tarn, but we couldn't find any of the tiny amphibians that we'd seen the day before, when we had passed the tarn on our way to the lake.

"What the hell?" J. said.

"You don't suppose," R. said, then lapsed into silence.

"Maybe we'd better head back," I said.

We took a slightly different route this time, following a tiny ridge just south of the lake. Far below we saw the abyss of Dickey Creek Canyon. On the distant horizon, snow-capped Mount Hood did battle with a front of grey clouds.

"Look!" J. shouted. "There he is!"

Ripples radiated across the lake from where the grey form was kneeling.

"Single-minded, isn't he?" I said to no-one in particular.

"Weird, I'd say," said R.

"Ha – h'm," said J.

By the time we reached the lake-edge, the man was near the spot where we had first seen him, having apparently circled the lake. The sun shone full on him, and his hood and cloak were glistening wet. His sack had grown quite large, and was moving like a living thing; it was in fact quite full of squirming newts. As we approached the man he had drawn the sack closed, and was dipping it in the lake-water.

He was turned away from us as we drew near, and we could not see his face. Then he seemed to become aware of us, and he turned his head slightly, so that we could see his deep black eyeballs, and orange-brown, wrinkled, rubbery skin covering a face which drew us to a halt. Before we could speak, the creature was heading for the trees, carefully pulling his sack after him. As he reached the bushes, his cloak fell away, and his tail flopped free. Short, thin legs propelled him out of sight. He was gone, taking with him all of the newts from both lake and tarn. Below us, in the direction of the canyon, I thought I could hear him flopping through the rhododendron and Bear Grass, hurrying toward, no doubt, some warm and wet sanctuary far below.

We sat beside the lake, silently, for a while. It was J. who broke the silence, as we watched icy clouds forming and disintegrating far above.

"Winter's coming on," he said, and it was. ❑

Todd Mecklem made his **BBR** debut last issue with "Mr Keim Adrift". *The Liquid Retreats*, his collaborative chapbook with Jonathan Falk, is about to be published by Wordcraft.

MOGOLLÓN NEWS

by **UNCLE RIVER**
Our New Mexico Correspondent

At The Cafe

Gina Mitchell reports quite an event that took place last Saturday at the cafe. The cafe is quite an event itself. It is located in what was once the J.P. Holland General Store. That is the massive building you will hit if your brakes fail coming into town.

You should be warned about J.P.'s cafe. The food is so good and the prices so reasonable that the locals have been known actually to go in there and buy a meal. This is quite astounding when you stop to consider how little money ever makes it as far from civilization as Mogollón.

Last Saturday, an elderly couple came in about quarter to one and sat down. The woman looked around and then commented to Gina, who was having coffee and a cinnamon roll at the next table: "We used to live in Mogollón."

Gina smiled, but before she could respond, another woman at the table on the other side spoke up. "So did I. When were you here?"

"Thirty-two, thirty-three — right up to thirty-six."

"I was here then ... Wait a minute. You're not Lucy and Claude?"

"We were last I knew," replied Claude.

Lucy lowered her head slightly so she could see more clearly through the top part of her bifocals. "Glory be! Is that you, Rose?"

"It sure is."

"My Lord," said Lucy, "it's been fifty years. Where have you been keeping yourself all this time?"

"You remember the job Jeremiah got with the railroad when we left Mogollón in thirty-five?"

"Indeed I do. That job was quite a stroke of fortune."

"He worked out of San Antone for thirty-eight years. Put three kids through college. Then he retired. Always wanted to come back up here for a visit. But he passed away last year without ever getting to it. So I came for us."

Lucy and Claude were both touched. Rose then asked about them.

"We did all right too. We've got seven grandchildren now. And Claude retired president of the machinists' local. Summers we mostly travel in the motor home. In winter we've got a place down at Heat Stroke."

"Heat Stroke, Texas?"

"You know it?"

"Know it! I live not ten miles from there, right in Cottonmouth."

They exchanged addresses and more stories, and Rose moved over to Lucy and Claude's table for lunch. But then, on their way out the door, Rose stopped.

"Lucy."

"Yes, Rose?"

"Lucy, do you still cheat at poker?"

We never did hear the answer, but one of those people left the best tip of the day. ✹

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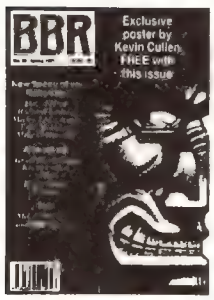

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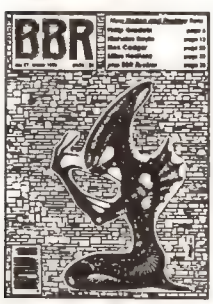

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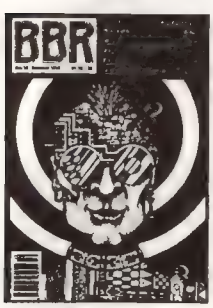

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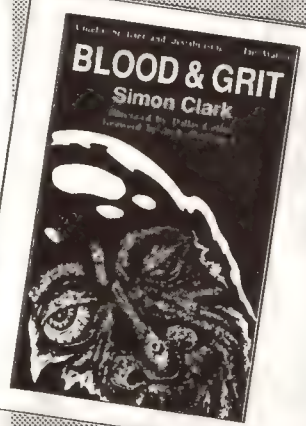

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Master Finlayson's Boy

Diana Reed

The Shig had eaten someone, that much was plain. So now the animals' carcasses were stacked outside their cellar pen, dead with human blood still staining their jaws; ram, sows and shiglets together.

"We've got the body indoors," said Arlinth. "The pieces, I mean. Do you want to see them?"

"Certainly. Ask one of your men to draw a pitcher of water for me." Conservator Cleybury replied.

It did not take a coffin – only a large, lined box, of the sort in which ration was distributed. Cleybury drew off her white gloves. Arlinth's eyes were drawn to her hands, mottled with age, the blue veins standing out against otherwise pale skin. She drew on rubber gloves from her pack. Then he turned away.

"Have you seen this?" she asked.

"I found it. The shig were excited. I looked in. There was an ear. And a hand, I think, but only really the thumb. Then I knew ..."

After perhaps three minutes, she closed the lid, and moved away to wash her gloved hands.

"The shig didn't do it. Not the killing," she said. "Some of those bones have been sliced through cleanly. Shig's

teeth couldn't do it. It looks like a power tool. But could how could there be one, here?" He shrugged. "I don't know. All I can think about's the girl. Syld. I only slept with her that day, but she was ... I don't know."

"She was a valuable scavenger. We've had a lot from her, in the past."

"Please, let's get out. Back to the carriage, at least."

"We'll talk here," she said harshly. "I need everything you know. Start with what the last Youngmaster told you about this place ..."

The Carlton estate was the westernmost point on the Circuit Arlinth had been assigned on the retirement of the previous Arbitrator. It was not an isolated outpost: the old motorway ran clear and unobstructed this far, its level surface offering a relatively easy ride for the dreys with ration, returning with Trove and any goods the Meek (who had inherited this sad earth) could manage to produce from the cold, sun-scorched land.

Nevertheless to the people who came to the Big House at Assize to trade, claim allowance, or yield finds, Youngmaster Arlinth and his men were figures from another world: powerful judges who could also be dismissed as the city men, the Coal-Eaters.

Arlinth was not ashamed of the name. He had seen the soft rocks black as a moonless night flaked from the opencast mine, then brewed with first one organism then another to make the blocks of ration on which city and settlement depended. They were good and wholesome; and he was young, and believed in a future.

He listened to the outgoing man with an appearance of patience, but probably would not take his advice.

"At Carlton's there's a girl – Syld. You'd do me a favour, if you'd keep an eye on her."

The old man had been her lover for the past nine years. She was fortunate in having an independent holding, enough to support a small herd of shig. Less fortunate, in that although it was four years since she had passed the age of eighteen and ceased to be a young person she had failed to become a mother and so had no entitlement to an allowance of ration. Her living was precarious.

"She was clever with finds." The ex-Arbitrator told Arlinth. "And naturally I was generous in assessing the reward. She didn't have any family – only an uncle who wasn't any use to her at all. I saw him off, paid him off, same thing.

"She was pretty when she was young. Still good looking. I thought of bringing her to the City, when I retired."

"Then why didn't you?" Arlinth asked.

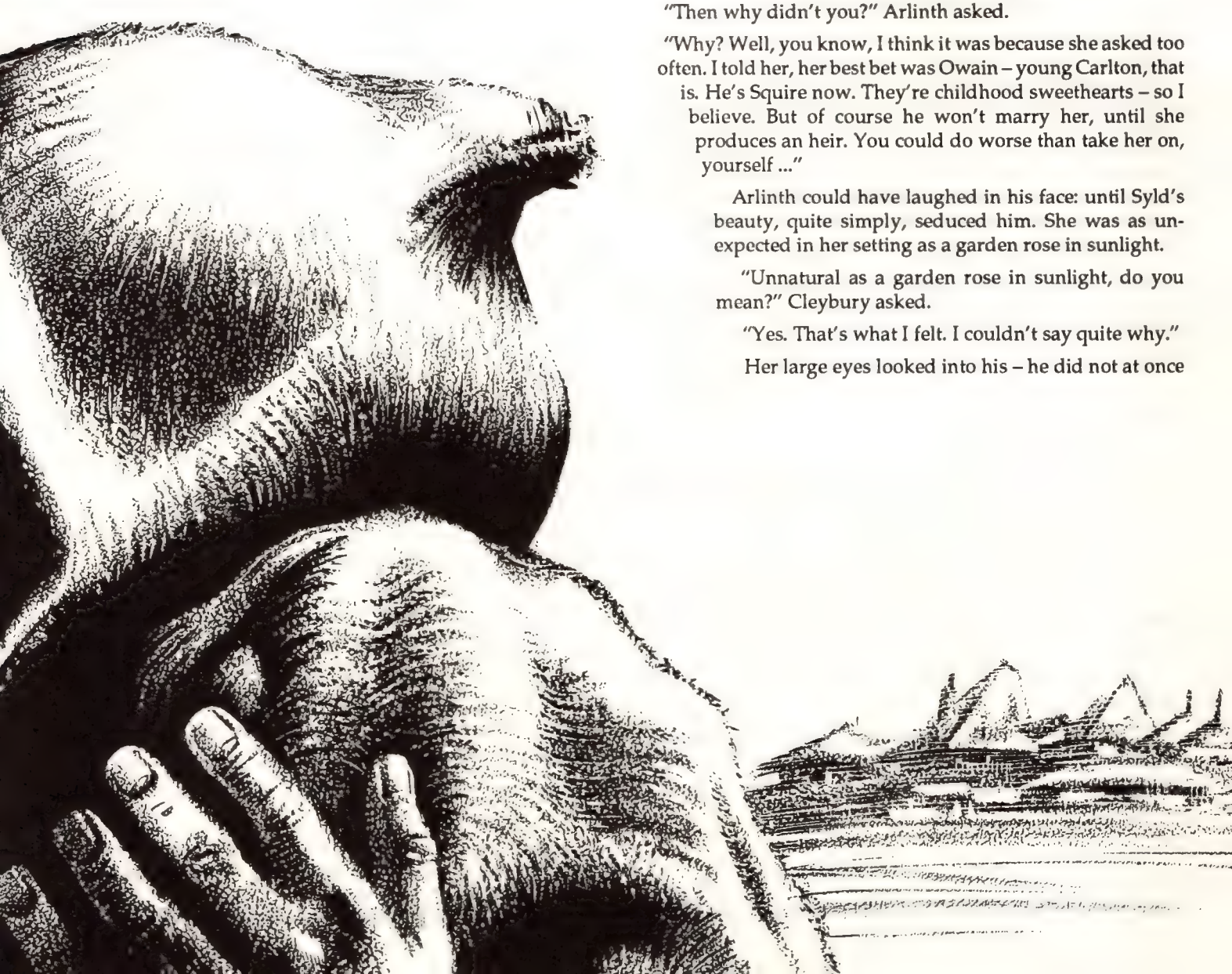
"Why? Well, you know, I think it was because she asked too often. I told her, her best bet was Owain – young Carlton, that is. He's Squire now. They're childhood sweethearts – so I believe. But of course he won't marry her, until she produces an heir. You could do worse than take her on, yourself ..."

Arlinth could have laughed in his face: until Syld's beauty, quite simply, seduced him. She was as unexpected in her setting as a garden rose in sunlight.

"Unnatural as a garden rose in sunlight, do you mean?" Cleybury asked.

"Yes. That's what I felt. I couldn't say quite why."

Her large eyes looked into his – he did not at once



Conservator Cleybury

perceive the subtle thickening and darkening of the lashes, the shading of the lids. Her hair, thick and glossy, seemed at first glance to have been quickly cut, yet framed her face perfectly. Her gestures and movements spoke respect and quiet reserve, while her eyes maintained contact with his. She had shig wool to sell, and a minor domestic artefact for assessment, but his clerks could have dealt with them as easily as he himself.

"Except that I fell in love with her. At first sight, yes."

Owain drank potato barm from soon after sun-down, and as early as mid-night his speach was slurred. The two men retired to a small dining-room for lunch at one o'clock, and it was then that Owain came nearest to warning Arlinth off.

"Syld – don't believe in her. She's not the woman she was six months ago."

"She looks all right to me."

"I mean, she wasn't like that, before. Good enough sort, nothing special to look at. She's changed. Mazingly changed."

"So what? – If it's for the better?"

"You ask her. She'll invite you back. S'obvious. I know what she wants. You remember, when she makes her sell, I know all about it. All about it. And the thing's mine too. My land she found it on. I want a share."

"Are you telling me she's withholding a find, for private bargaining?"

"I'm not telling you nothing. I've been put in my place, all right. She sent him to get me. Hauled me up like a peasant. Let her play it her way, but you remember, I'll not be cut out ..."

Now Arlinth and Conservator Cleybury sat at the table in the same indirect light from the high north-facing window that the day before had lit his lovemaking with Syld. In the single room, only the unmade bed and unwashed dishes from the supper that she had cooked him before they returned to bed again marred the complete, simple cleanliness and order.

"And was the sex good?" Cleybury asked.

Syld's skin had felt as smooth as it had looked. He had willingly allowed her to set the pace of their joining, as she demanded and gave in return. The first time had been fast and direct, the second exploratory but no less intense. In the past he had courted an inexperienced young woman of his own class; he had also employed a prostitute; neither experience was comparable.

"I think after that I'd have given her whatever she wanted, in the end."

He had not found out exactly what that was. As they sat at this same wooden table eating warm bread and broth, she had started to talk about the city – her idea of the city, a place of safety, comfort, and opportunity, where her life could be opening out, not closing in to a dead end.

"But what could you do?" Arlinth asked. "You'd have to work. You've no skills. You'd have to dig coal. And these hands ..." – he had caught them up in his, and they were smooth – "... they'd get rough and browned in the sun, however you tried to protect them. And your face, even with the sun-shield. And your eyes would ache ..."

She'd pulled her hands away from his: "I wouldn't dig coal – what did you think I meant? I'd need money. And then perhaps I'd marry, if I found the right man. Have children. I'm not barren. I lost a baby last year, but I conceived. You didn't know that? It was Owain's. I'd be all right now. I'm well now."

"I'd like to take you. But I'm not established yet. I barely support myself."

"I'll have money – if we do things right. But I need your help –"

"Ah – is this what Carlton told me about?" he asked teasingly.

"Owain? Owain told you about it?" She was shocked and angry.

"Everything," he lied, out of devilment and curiosity.

"Damn him! He's mine, do you understand?"

"And you're welcome to him. Then what was all that about the city? Carlton won't leave his estate."

"Carlton? Wait – I heard ..." She went to the door, flung it open and peered out into the broad daylight. Tears streamed down her cheeks as the bright light pressed against her face.

"Come back in! What are you doing? You haven't any shades, you'll hurt your eyes, you silly, lovely girl ..."

"Don't bluff," she said quietly, as he held her and kissed her, licking away the tears. "You don't know at all. Nothing."

"Tell me later," he said, guiding her to the bed. "Beautiful Syld. Darling Syld."

Later, they slept. When he woke, the room was grey with evening, and he could hear the shig in their cellar-pen under

the bothy snorting and screeching. Syld was out of bed, pulling on her shift.

"Do they always make this row?" he asked sleepily.

"Something's disturbed them," she said.

"Rats? Do you want me to come?"

"Rats don't bother shig. Anyway, they sound excited. Not frightened. But I'd better see what's up."

He heard Syld scream, but the screams trailed off almost immediately, as if whatever shocked her had been resolved. The shig quietened. Syld did not come back. Arlinth lit the lamp, and dressed hastily. He walked round to the cellar, and found the shig still gnawing at their unexpected extra feed. Recognising the fragments of bone and flesh as human, he fled to the big house for his clerks and their weapons before daring try to recover the remains.

"They weren't the girl's," said the Conservator. "You saw what you feared."

"Not Syld? But you've seen – bits of body –" he objected.

"Yes. Someone has been killed. And very nastily. But someone at least as large as you, rough-skinned from outdoor work, and probably male – but I'm not a medic and with everything so mangled I need confirmation of that."

"Not Syld, thank God! But where is she?"

"That, Arlinth, is the question that should have been asked from the start. Now help me up on the chair – I want to measure the distances between the things on those shelves ..."

Cleybury's examination of the room took some time. A driver, shielded and visored against the day, came to take the box to the city, for forensic analysis.

Arlinth yawned. She suggested he took some sleep, while she continued outside.

"In the daylight?" he questioned.

"I'll wrap up well. And the latest forecast's good. You could almost sunbathe, today."

"I'd rather not."

"Just do as I say. Sleep. Take the bed. I've seen all I want inside. Use those sheets. They're cotton. They must be her best, older than me. Handed down, I expect, mother to daughter. Beautifully looked after. Like everything else in here. Did you notice the precision of the placing of those plates on the shelves?"

She woke him an hour before sunset. Spread on the table were maps and the official record of Assize, brought in from his vehicle; together with a copy of an old guidebook to the city that underlay the land from here to the north and east.

"Make us some tea, my boy, and I'll tell you where I think we should go next ..."

Dippy Lane emerged from a broken tunnel in the side of the motorway embankment and led north to the area known locally as 'the Dusty Place', though the scrub that covered rough hillocks and smoother mounds held the topsoil firmly enough. There they found an open tomb. Rock and soil had slipped down, a raw wound in the side of one of the larger tumuli. The ragged-edged hole, just large enough for a man to clamber through, opened into wide blackness. Arlinth fetched lamps from his carriage. The Conservator took one from him and led the way in.

Its dim, steady light showed a huge cubic space empty of everything except rubbish – shards of glass; brittle and broken plastic tubing; and cannisters with forgotten symbols and smaller writing faded beyond legibility, barely recognisable as instructions and warnings. The original plaster had fallen from the walls, adding to the dust and litter, showing the structure to be of large concrete blocks.

"What was it?" Arlinth asked. "A factory? Did they make something here?"

"No. You're quite right – that's what I more than half expected. 'Dusty Place' – the old maps show an industrial estate. It's on Owain's land – that ties in with what he told you. And the girl never reported any of her finds as coming from here, though I'd have expected it to be at least an occasional source. Here it is then, where I expected it to be. But not what I expected ..."

"So what was it?"

"A pyramid – a tumulus – a cryogenic store where the nearly-dead body of a very rich man could be kept until a later time, when he could be brought to life again."

Arlinth's eyes widened with ancient fears of the dead. "That was what she found?"

"No, no," said the Conservator softly. "No-one has ever bought immortality. Not the Pharoahs. Not the rich men. No-one ever will – not now. But like the Pharaohs, rich men prepared for their resurrection. They were not buried alone. They had treasures, and servants, buried with them. I expect there's gold hidden here somewhere. But I don't think it was gold that Syld found."

She would not be drawn on what it might have been. Instead, she hurried them both from the chamber and with all speed back to the Big House, where the radio gave direct communication with the City.

"We'll find them," she said, with quiet grimness. "I doubt they will be travelling by day. Warn your men to be armed and ready. If we're lucky, the satellite will pinpoint them within the hour."

It took not one pass of the satellite, but three. It was daytime again before the girl was located. She appeared to have a companion, though here the trace was inconclusive. Under cover of day, the thorny hollow in which they had taken shelter was surrounded by Arlinth's men, charged on the Conservator's instructions not to approach closer.

"Now we will go in and talk with them," she said. "Or rather, I shall talk – you will represent authority, Arlinth. That is your weapon. I rather think we would stand little chance in a hand-to-hand fight, so do not be tempted to initiate one."

"I'm not afraid of Owain."

"You imagine he's still alive? No, her companion is not Owain. Nor, I believe, even human. No human being kept that hovel perfectly clean and tidy – the ornaments perfectly aligned, nothing out of place."

"Then, what is it?"

"I don't know precisely. Only remember, you are the Youngmaster, you represent legitimate power."

Syld was asleep, huddled under and hidden by her cloak; shading her, dull black in the sun, stood the metal figure of a man that turned towards Arlinth and the Conservator before they came into sight, hearing every movement, but merely waiting.

"This is Youngmaster Arlinth. I believe you will recognise him," the old woman said to the creature. "He is the Arbitrator appointed for this area. I am Conservator Cleybury."

Syld woke and sat up, blinking in the daylight, shading her eyes with her hands. Arlinth moved towards her, the need to feel the livingness of her body urging him to kneel beside her, wrap his arms around her, feel her breath on his face.

"Don't you dare come any closer," she said. "He'll kill you, if I tell him."

"Who do you belong to?" Cleybury asked the robot.

"I don't know."

"Then who did you belong to?"

"I was Master Finlayson's boy. But Master Finlayson is dead." The robot's voice was pleasant, mellow.

"Then you belong to his heirs. Is Syld his heir?"

"No."

"But you serve her?"

"That's right!" said Syld. "He serves me! Me! So leave us alone!"

"And where will you go, away from the city? How will you live?"

"He'll look after me."

"Syld! What's happened to you?" Arlinth asked. "I thought you loved me –"

"Owain's dead. I killed him."

"What? With your own hands?" the Conservator asked dryly.

"No. I didn't mean to. I didn't want it to happen – not like that."

The old woman sat down on a cushion of rough grass not too far, not too near. She took from her pocket a spare eye-shield.

"Here – use this. We don't wish you ill. There's enough harm done already."

"And what about you?" asked Syld, looking at Arlinth. "Do you blame me? Do you hate me now?"

"How can the Arbitrator know whether to blame you or not?" the old woman said gently. "Talk to us. Tell us what happened. We have all day, if need be. Tell us how you came by Master Finlayson's Boy."

It was the night after the old Arbitrator left forever. Syld drove her small herd of shig to pasture as usual. About an hour before dawn Owain came to her – not quietly and reasonably, a man approaching a woman who has lost her lover and protector, but whooping down the old motorway embankment like the youngster he had been years past, hallooing and waving his arms. Her flock scattered.

"See what you've done!" Syld shouted at him. He was taller than her, and twice her weight.

"Come on, Syld. Aren't you glad to see me?" He grabbed her shoulders and tried to kiss her lips.

"I'll bite your tongue off if you try that now, see if I don't!" – laughing and angry she twisted away. "You've scared the shig! And where's Harro?"

The ewes had stopped, separately, all within sight, but the boar was gone.

"He'll come back." Owain said.

"He's stupid enough not to. And it's not far off dawn."

"I'll find him for you." Owain was eager for a quest to replace other lost excitement.

"No – you take the flock back to my barn. Harro knows me. I'll get after him."

The pursuit led her down Dippy Lane, to the Dusty Place, where the shig followed its snout to root out the fungi it could smell beneath the surface. The ground began to crack open almost beneath its feet. She could see clearly in the half-light, as the animal displaced another stone, which slipped aside taking two or three others with it, and her boar disappeared into the ground.

Frightened now, Syld ran to peer into near-darkness. Harro found nothing edible, and came whining back to his mistress. She scrabbled to enlarge the hole. The sun began to rise in a clear blue sky, and the light dazzled her. At last she loosened a large stone which fell in, taking more soil and rock with it to make a

Syld

ramp down to the room and a window large enough for a human to clamber in. Harro retreated to the far side of the chamber.

Syld's eyes adjusted to the dimness. There was nothing recognisable in the room; only rubbish, dim piles, jagged, sometimes gleaming faintly, but all dirty and broken. Different was a low mound in the middle of the floor, darker than the surrounding dust. The rising sun pointed in like a finger through the opening, touching a matt black form, darker than shadow, so dark that the detail became lost, except where grey dust pooling in the hollows or against the ridges of his curled mock-human body acted to highlight the metal curve of neat buttocks, falling to a narrow waist then rising higher to broad shoulders. She walked around him to see his face, seemingly asleep, grey under tight curls of sculpted hair. It was a young, pretty face, but with something lopsided about it, as if it had belonged to a person; and the rest of the body was equally personal – nipples, umbilicus, penis.

Its eyes opened and it saw her. She skipped back, scared, towards the window of light, but unwilling to brave the day. The figure did not move. When it spoke, it asked to be moved into the sun.

As she listened, Conservator Cleybury shifted position, allowed a look of doubt to cross her face.

"How well do you remember? Really? Can you remember what was said?"

"I think so."

"Every word?"

"Well – no. I mean, who would?"

"Master Finlayson's Boy. He will remember precisely. Let's hear from him –"

She did not answer his request, and he was too weak to turn his head. There was an animal in his line of sight.

"What is that?" he asked. His speech was faint and slurred.

"Shig. My shig."

"The sun is strong."

"Yes."

"I can use it."

Fragments of memory were coming back to the creature on the floor, where at first he had woken only to perception, the sun on his back warming and powering him. His master talking casually to Trelawny, the bio-manager –

"So what sort of domestic animal do you think might cope? Goats?"

"Maybe. But they'd eat off all the grass – that wouldn't help in the long run. Pigs have a more useful sort of omniverousness. There isn't much of a pig you can't eat, either," said Trelawny.

"I'll still put my money on a grazer. If grass does hold out. And there's clothes as well as food to think of."

The man opposite shrugged: "Well, it is your money, Mr Finlayson. Perhaps some combination of the two. Goat and pig, perhaps. A poat. Or a gig."

A shig – that was what the thing was. So pig and sheep had won out. His master would find that indicative, in due course. What of the human being? She had come nearer again. Female, from the voice, aged twenty or less. She stared at him, unmoving except for the shallow rise and fall of breath under an unshaped, heavy garment that did not give him any more clue to her status than her pale, smooth face – a face that managed to be round as well as gaunt, and quite unreadable without the expected clues: make-up, hairstyle, jewellery. It had none of those. They were from another time, far enough removed to be another world. The world he had come from.

So memory returned, prompted by recognition of unfamiliarity. He knew a duty to his master, to investigate this breach of their rest and counter any possible threat. But without more power he could not act, and the finger of light was moving away as the sun crossed the sky.

"I need the light. Move me."

Syld was slow to respond, fear numbing her reactions.

"Into the sun. I need the light," his crackling, human voice insisted.

She pushed him over, onto his back. The light fell on his face. Now he could see the hole that let the sun in. Syld's hands held the memory of his skin, warm where the light had shone on it, but hard, and rough like weathered stone.

The sun moved on again and still he was impotent.

"Help me outside," he demanded.

Again she did not move at once.

"My master would be obliged if you helped me outside. I do not think it will be beyond your strength," he said.

Syld did not bargain. She did not know she could. After a moment's further hesitation she began to tug and pull awkwardly at the heavy body, trying to avoid the sun falling on her face. When she came to the slope she found it hard, as she would not go outside into the day to pull, but lifted and pushed from partial shelter, while the robot had not the energy to help. Then he was out, soaking up the burning light, feeling thoughts and body strengthen by the minute.

In an hour he could move. Nonetheless he waited, with the patience of a being not created to fear uncertainty, in order to maximise his power and so usefulness. As the bright spring sun slipped below the horizon he stood smoothly, turned, and went back in.

His master was dead, the cryogenic machines cracked and scattered. Of the precious things that had been left with him for his wakening there was little left to see – handfuls of gold, some glass from rotted machines. Perhaps there was something of the master left in the memories of the servant: memories of his conversations, his appearance, his affections and prejudices, his jokes. But his master had scorned the immortality of fame, especially fame bought by wealth. He had hoped to buy the real thing. To live in the memory of a robot was nothing.

Master Finlayson was gone. Irretrievably, the robot was sure, as he looked at the scattered dry dust; no marvels of reconstruction even theoretically possible from no longer existent flesh.

His boy had no purpose. He stood blocking the doorway, without any reason to come in or go out. He was human enough

in his way of thought to experience something like regret, to taste futility.

"Please ..." Syld said. She and the shig were still there, unable to leave before day's end. "Let me go. You said your master would be obliged ..."

He stood aside from the exit. She drove the shig through and it ran, squealing, past the robot. Syld followed. That was all she had asked for. Yet there was an obligation. To meet it was the only task remaining.

"Is there nothing else?" he asked. His voice was stronger now.

"I want to go home."

"I will go with you."

"No! – No, thank you." Syld said, with the cautious politeness of the weak.

"Don't thank me. My master is obliged. I am obliged. Thanks are for the free."

"I'm not keeping you," she said, more boldly.

"Don't thank me. Remember."

"I'll remember. Now I want to go home."

"Call for Master Finlayson's Boy if you need me. I will never be far from you, night or day."

He followed her home, not too closely. There was the light of more than one candle shining profligately through the high window of the bothy, though she lived alone.

Master Finlayson's Boy heard the door opening, and then a new voice, a man's, loud and complaining. When the door closed again, he came nearer, to wait under the eaves, so that he would hear if he was called.

The old woman listening stretched and shifted her position: "Those clerks of yours must be brewing up by now, Youngmaster Arlinth." she said. "Men can't do anything for long without stopping for a cup of what they like to call tea. Do you think we might have a drink too? I expect you could do with it, Syld dear ..."

When he came back, she commented on the usefulness of having someone to do such things: "... but you know that, of course. Master Finlayson's Boy must have been a great help to you. I expect that's why you found it so hard to give him up, why you didn't report your find?"

"It wasn't like that – I didn't think of that at first."

"What did you think, you and Owain, when the Boy followed you home that night? I suppose Owain was waiting for you?"

"No – he'd gone."

"So who had lit the candles?" Arlinth asked.

"All right, if you must know, it was my Uncle." The girl became angry, remembering. "He thought he owned me. Now the old Arbitrator had gone – he said he'd look after my trading and bring me men –"

"If that's how things are done, out here –" Cleybury temporised.

"I said no, and he was angry, and he did it. He fucked me. Just because he was angry. I couldn't think at the time. But then, just after, I called. I called Master Finlayson's Boy."

Rotten wood gave before the hinges broke, the door burst open, and the doorway was filled by the naked metal man. He looked to Syld, curled on a couch of rags, pulling at her skirt. The stranger sat, angry, puzzled, bare from the waist down, shrunk and wet.

"What shall I do, Mistress?" the robot asked.

"Kill him!" Syld said in fierce glee. "Now! Kill him!"

Master Finlayson's Boy, like a well-trained animal, had a built-in resistance to harming a human being; but would a rich man keep his watchdog toothless? The robot did not care what had happened, but knowing what had happened enabled him to obey. Allowed individual initiative to decide the means, he held the man to him, the sweating back to his cold, rigid chest, wrapping his arms around in an unbreakable embrace, with so little effort that he could easily with one hand hold his captive's mouth and pinch his nose tight closed. In the minutes it took the man to die Syld saw the robot thrust forward again and again, raping the man as the man had raped her. He could not scream however he chawed at the fleshless palm stopping his mouth. At last the robot placed the body on the earth floor. Then, his penis still erect, he turned to the girl.

"No!" she screamed. Glee had been smothered by horror minutes since, though she never called for a halt.

"I won't hurt you," the creature said.

"Keep away!" – she misunderstood his meaning. He stood where he was.

"I will only do what you want."

"Then why did you do that?"

"You told me to kill him."

"Not like that!"

In the waning day, the Conservator again interrupted the account the girl gave to turn to the robot: "So why?" she insisted. "I understand how you were able to do it, but why that way?"

The robot reviewed the near-human complexity of the factors determining his actions. There was a reason why.

"It would have satisfied my master."

The robot carried away the body, and it was not discovered. Afterwards, Syld did not call the robot back to the house and he, without orders, merely waited, always within range but not in sight. His discretion was part of his given nature. Master Finlayson's Boy did not make himself or his abilities too obvious. People did not like it.

At the same time he learned as much as he could about the place and time to which he had come. This was not from curiosity, but in case it might help him meet his master's obligation to Syld. It would not occur to him to suggest ways in which he could help her directly. People told robots what they wanted done. Similarly, he would not take it on himself to judge when the obligation was fulfilled. Only his master or Syld herself could do that.

The next time Owain came, he found the empty doorframe half-blocked by an upended table.

"What's this?" he asked.

"No door." Syld replied laconically.

"What happened to it?"

"A metal man came and knocked it down."

"What?"

"A huge metal man. From the Dusty Place. Look, forget it. I need a new door."

"I'll get it fixed. But don't give me stuff about metal men. I don't care if you tell me or not. Just don't lie to me."

"Syld, don't lie to us, either." Arlinth said. "It won't help you. He knew. He told me it was found on his land –"

"He didn't know then." Syld said. "After Uncle – I didn't tell anyone. He found out. Owain came here often enough, those weeks after, he probably caught sight of Boy himself."

"Was Owain courting you?" Cleybury asked.

Syld looked up, pain in her face: "I thought so. I thought, now the old Arbitrator had gone, perhaps he would marry me, even. But then I got ill."

Although with the warm weather there was food enough to be had, she lost weight, found it hard to eat, and was often sick. There was no joy in teasing and love-making now, and Owain came less frequently, then kept away altogether.

One night Syld drove her herd of shig to the slope of the old motorway, near the paths that led to the Dusty Place where she had woken the robot, now following her unseen. When she walked she leaned heavily on her crook, and once seated did not move. The time came when she could not delay calling the flock together. After a score or so of steps she collapsed again onto the tussocky grass. Then she called: "Master Finlayson's Boy!"

He broke out of the bushes not fifty metres away and ran to her. He did not stand over her but came, like a concerned human, to kneel by her side, his face close to hers. Her shift was stained with blood, spreading and bright from no visible wound, stemming from the slow, steady stream running between her thighs like urine.

"Help me," she said faintly. "It's never like this, when I bleed. I don't understand."

"Stay still. Don't try to move."

The robot reviewed his medical data. It covered first aid, and the maintainance and use of cryogenic tanks. What use could he make of it, with no drugs, no bandages, no hospitals, nothing?

"When did you last menstruate – I mean, bleed?"

"Three moons – four moons. I never know when it'll come. But not like this. What's happening to me?"

"It could be several things. There's not much I can do. Just stay still, wait till it stops."

Her teeth began to chatter, though it was not a cold night.

"I want to go home. Help me!"

"I'll carry you –"

He picked her up as gently as he could. Strength was no problem, he had plenty of that. He ran smoothly, almost gliding over the ground – a human could not have maintained the speed and style for more than a few steps.

"It's getting light!" Syld cried. "Hurry!". She hid her face against his shoulder. All the while her blood flowed over his arm and torso, dripped down his legs to the ground.

He set her on the rough mattress. Nowhere was clean. There was nothing he could do about her basic condition, but he could try to improve her chances of survival if the haemorrhage stopped spontaneously by imposing hygiene, starting with boiling water to sterilise – what?

Quickly the robot went through the room. He found the cotton sheets; and with them a long white dress and veil. All very old, packed away with dry, sweet scented herbs. He boiled the sheets together with the dress. Syld was half-aware, too weak to cry a halt to the destruction.Then she lost consciousness. She was very pale, but the tide of oozing blood over the palliasse halted and darkened.

Arlinth

He hung the sheets and dress in the sun. Then he cleaned the bothy as best he could. Unconsciousness had become sleep – Syld stirred once, and a fresh trickle of red streaked the darker crimson, but then stopped.

She would need food. He ran to round up the shig. Most had found shade, and were browsing around the base of the stunted trees and bushes. The robot's prize was the ewe in milk, and he took from her a cupful of liquid.

Next he took clean straw from the loft, and spread one dry sheet on it. Then he cut away the girl's soiled clothes, and peeled them off her. Syld woke, and saw his hands, nails extended into cutting claws, fingers angled for scissors or shears.

"Stay still. I'm going to clean you up a bit."

He made his hands soft again, sensitive and warm, as they had been required when he was with Master Finlayson or one of his favoured guests for sex. Gentlemen and ladies, he knew them both, and as he washed the girl with warm water and torn strips from the white dress the lips and passages of her body were as familiar as the doors and rooms of the house in which he had served.

Half-in, half-out of the vagina, the antechamber to the womb, was the expelled, dead foetus. He pulled it away, and was met only with old blood. It was not worth the risk of exploring further.

"What's that?" Syld asked, looking at the clotted thing not much bigger than the top joints of the thumb and finger that grasped it.

"The foetus."

"What?"

"The baby. You were pregnant. You miscarried."

"My baby? Let me see!"

He held it closer, and she looked as if she would reach out to touch it, but did not. The fierce, painful fascination she felt excluded the robot. His understanding was that the clot of cells he held was not yet, properly, a baby, and if this was grief, it was misplaced.

"It is small and undeveloped. I am not programmed to know how early on it was."

"I didn't know! I want it! It mustn't be dead!"

"It is dead. I will dispose of it suitably. But first I will finish cleaning you, and then move you to the fresh bed that I have prepared."

The robot's studied gentleness was disarming. He had invaded her room, destroyed her treasures – but it was all right, as she began to feel safe, cared for. Only the bloody lump among the used rags demanded a better sense of reality.

"I want to see Owain," she said.

"I will bring him to you. May I finish here first?"

"Yes – get it cleaned up. Then fetch him."

Soon after moon-up, Owain was checking the rat-traps in the scrub on the motorway embankment. He was given no chance to run. Master Finlayson's Boy held his shoulder in a metal vice, though his words were courteous: "Syld would be grateful if you could come to her now."

Owain had only glimpsed the matt black figure from a distance before, never known that he could speak. It seemed to him the robot's unexpected voice robbed him of the ability to use his own, as terror tightened in his throat. He nodded acquiescence. The robot's grip slackened, and they walked with Owain ahead, unable to see his companion, but aware of every slight sound his feet made, the moon-shadow he cast, and the silence of no breath while Owain could hear his own breathing shallow with unslackening fear.

At the bothy door Owain hung back. Master Finlayson's Boy reached past, opened it, pushed him gently forward but remained outside himself, again closing the door.

The room was cleaner, starker. He did not know why Syld lay covered on the low couch, and saw her face as old and stern, corrupted by the thing that had brought him there.

"What are you and that metal bugger up to, Syld?" he asked.

Tears came to her eyes at the harshness in his voice, and the tears made her part of humanity again.

"I've been ill," she replied. Her voice was weak, and he knelt by her to hear better. "Master Finlayson's Boy saved me."

"What is he?"

"Something from the old time."

"You told me he broke your door."

"He did," she said.

"I believe you now. And he came from the Dusty Place. What does he want?"

"Nothing. He does what I tell him."

"Why?"

She shrugged: "I found him. Something to do with that. I don't know."

"He's a robot. They use them in the City," Owain said.

"I never heard of one like that. He's – like a person. Made like a person."

"He'll do what you tell him because you're a human and he's a robot. That's all."

"All right," Syld said. "You tell him to come here."

"Robot!" Owain called. "Come in!"

Nothing happened.

"Master Finlayson's Boy! Come here!" Syld almost whispered.

The door opened.

"Do you want anything, Syld?"

"Only to know you were there."

"We'll have to hand him over," Owain said. "He's a real finding. I'll call the City from home."

"Piss on you, Owain! Don't you dare!"

"Think of the money, Syld!"

"You think of it, then, I don't. D'you think I'd sell him?"

"It's not selling. It's a reward. For Trove."

"Shigshit!"

"Let me go now, Syld," Owain demanded.

"To call the City? No!"

"Then what're you going to do?" He was calm now, even dignified.

"Master Finlayson's Boy!" Syld answered indirectly. "Owain is going. But when he gets home he may call the City and tell the Coal-Eaters about you. If he does and they come for you, I want you to make it your first priority to escape them, find him, and cut him into little pieces and feed him to the shig."

"Yes, Syld, I will do that. But first he is to go home," the robot said levelly, standing clear of the door.

Arlinth exhaled sharply, audibly. Cleybury gave him a warning glance.

"That was it, wasn't it?" Syld said. "That's how it happened. I didn't mean it. Then, Boy heard what the Youngmaster said

to me when he guessed about a find, and it sounded as if he knew about Boy and Owain had told him. I didn't see Boy when I looked out, because he'd already gone. And I didn't think he'd really do it ..."

"Like you didn't stop him killing your Uncle," Cleybury commented. "Anger, a quick reaction – and no remorse until too late. But then, with Owain cowed at least for the moment, you had to be sure of being able to win over the next Arbitrator – even you realised Master Finlayson's Boy couldn't be kept secret forever –"

But he did so much for her. Life became comfortable. He cared for the shig, brought in the few crops and cut the scant grass for winter hay; found green herbs, wild tubers, and small animals to make into broth. All this while Syld rested – then in the later part of the night and early morning he stayed with her, saw her eat, brought her water for her bath, brushed her hair, cared for her body with a skill learned direct from a long-dead expert. At the same time, to distract her, he talked – he was a good conversationalist. She told him about neighbours, politics, Owain; years past, her wishes and fears for the future.

Sometimes, in the intimate time around dawn, she talked to him about love, her hopes and wishes, in the fantastic, unrealistic way of a young girl. She talked of sex as 'that', and found no pleasure in it, since her experiences had been entirely awkward or brutal. The robot's task in readying her to win the life she wanted meant teaching her otherwise. As the weather grew sharper, he slipped into the bed beside her to warm her. He softened his arms and cradled her in them. His hands brushed over her nipples. In her sleep, she moved against him. At last he made love to her, as he had been taught to do by experts, long ago. Not once, but many times, through the lengthening September days, until she came to meet him in bed, and led then followed and led again in the old harmony in which he had been instructed for the pleasure of his master and guests, female as well as male.

By the time of the Autumn Assize, he had made her seem a creature from another world – an earlier and easier one. Her shift no longer hung loose, but was gathered to emphasize her breasts and stomach; her hair was shaped to suit her face; and she carried herself with confident grace.

Arlinth could not help but be seduced.

"So, we have the whole story," said the Conservator. "And it's nearly dawn. We need that robot, Syld. He has so many lost skills."

"He's mine. I'm not letting him go."

"He has a mind of his own, of a sort. How long do you think he'll put up with you? You've used him, made him a murderer – and you haven't a fraction of his mentality. You're not even grateful to him –"

"I am! I owe him my life! Everything!"

"You've never thanked him ..."

"Then I'm thanking him now! But you – you keep out of it, you dried old shigturd!"

The Conservator stood up stiffly and brushed at her clothes where the grass and dried leaves had stuck.

"That's it, then," she said. "You heard what Syld said, Master Finlayson's Boy. Syld thanked you."

"Get her!" Syld shouted. "Get rid of them both – like you did the others!"

The robot did not react.

"'Thanks are for the free,'" the Conservator said to the robot. "You've more than fulfilled your obligation. You're free. But Youngmaster Arlinth represents legal authority now, and I imagine your programmes will enable you to obey him –"

Syld screamed, and ran at the old woman.

"Stop her!" Arlinth said, and the robot's hands again held her, but harshly now, tightening as she struggled in fierce anger until pain stilled her.

"What shall I do with you, Syld?" Arlinth asked. "Beautiful Syld –"

"Who has cost two men their lives, and could as lightly and easily have killed us at any time until I tricked her weapon from her," the Conservator answered. "You could take her back to the City for trial. Or you could order Master Finlayson's Boy to come with us in a half-an-hour or so. In the meantime let him decide what his master would have had him do with an extortioner who took such a rate of interest on a simple debt. That's what I recommend." ❑

Diana Reed worked as a radio producer before leaving the BBC to start a family and pursue a freelance career. She now has two young children and writes scripts and poems for broadcast.

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THE BRAINS OF RATS
by Michael Blumlein

Scream/Press, ISBN 0-10489-28-9, $25
Illustrated by Timothy Caldwell

Doctors are quite mad. It's obvious when I stare at the bald patch on my gynaecologist's head that *no-one* would do *his* job for *mundane reasons* (though now I live in America, those mundane reasons include a persuasive £100,000 a year). In the recently reissued/revamped *Atrocity Exhibition*, by the medically-trained J.G. Ballard, he gives us a little think piece. There are several real-life accounts of plastic surgery, with 'the patient' edited out and the names or titles of famous women substituted. One piece, "Mae West's Reduction Mammoplasty" is an account of men – surgeons – hacking, tearing and gouging 'Mae West's' mammary tissue. Why did this make the book? Because, says Jim, in a gloss included with the texts, "The bodies of these ... women form a kit of spare parts ... As they tease us, so we begin to dismantle them, removing sections of a smile, a leg stance, an enticing cleavage."

Michael Blumlein is a doctor. He hasn't been writing as long as Ballard but he shows clear similarities with JGB: a brutally flattened affect (lack of feeling), a medical turn of phrase, an obsession with dismemberment, surgery and mutilation.

By far the strongest story is "Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration" (from *Interzone* #7). Formerly, in tales and myths, the sinners ate the innocent: the blood and body of Jesus Christ, Irish babies, Shylock's debtors. Recently it's been fashionable to suggest that eating the guilty would solve two problems at once. Hence, Eat The Rich! But what if a man – say Ronald Reagan – is so very guilty that the entire Third World needs nourishment because of his crimes?

Lacking the ability to achieve transubstantiation, Blumlein, in a story of sheer balls-out sadism, describes clearing every organ and muscle of Reagan and growing them in vats, to make tallow, string, meat and building materials. Writing in a dry, pseudo-medical journal style which only points up the viciousness of the concept, Blumlein takes great pains to explain why Reagan must remain conscious and unanaesthetized throughout. He patiently describes each ligature and incision, the life support machine which should be brought to bear as each vital organ is removed.

The narrator does express sympathy for his paralysed but tortured subject; the passages only serve to point up Reagan's suffering. As the muscle relaxant wears off: "Mr Reagan responded superbly by beginning to breathe on his own immediately. Shortly thereafter, he began to shriek." The lack of any flicker of humanity by the author (notwithstanding the narrator's caveats) is frankly astonishing; outside of the very strongest pornography, nothing like this story has ever been published.

"The Brains of Rats" (*Interzone* #16) itself is a story of an obsession (as are "Shed his Grace", "Keeping House" and "The Wet Suit"), told in a prose which manages to be pretty whilst utterly devoid of affect. A man has discovered a way to ensure that all

Never mind the ...

THE UNUSUAL GENITALS PARTY and other stories

A4, 40pp, £3.50 from Veronica Colin, c/o CRM Ltd, 141 St James Road, Glasgow G4 0NS

The British national SF convention in Glasgow at Easter was an appropriate occasion to launch the latest anthology of new stories by members of the Glasgow SF Writers' Circle.

Well laid out and presented, and illustrated with obscure Victorian engravings, the eight stories include the winner and a runner-up from two popular SF competitions. This publication is no self-indulgent whimsy, but a serious portfolio and showcase for the writers' group.

The collection opens with the story that gives this volume its name. "The Unusual Genitals Party" concerns the archetypal bored student who plans the party-to-end-all-parties in celebration of his inheritance, only to find that things don't quite go as planned. It's a story that could so easily descend into smut and adolescent giggles, so all due praise to Fergus Bannon for handling the narrative with such restraint and aplomb.

More tongue-in-cheek is Jim Steel's "Shivering Sam Points the Way Ahead", where an extreme interpretation of the Prime Directive leads to AIs acquiring a highly developed social awareness. Underneath the cynicism and dark humour, however, there's the suggestion that older values and methods might still be more appropriate in the ultra-hi-tech society.

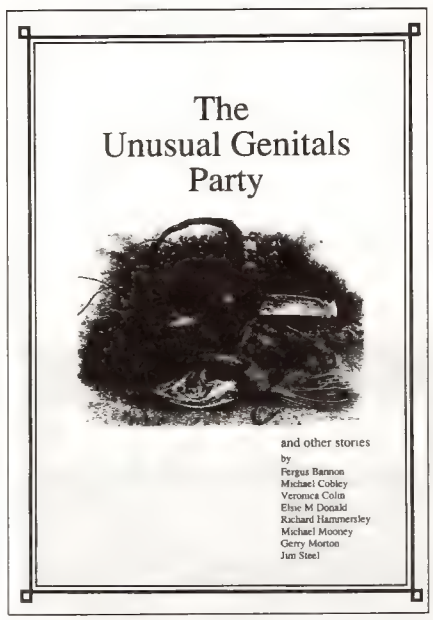
"John Knox Overlooking the Necropolis", by Michael Mooney, is one of three stories that offer alternate realities of a distinctly Scottish flavour. Here, Glasgow is progressively reduced to rubble when the people riot and turn on their city, observed by an unnamed narrator whose own involvement is never made perfectly clear. Only one gripe here, some readers not familiar with Glasgow might not get full enjoyment from the story because of the numerous historical and geographical references to the city in the text.

No such problem with Michael Cobley's "Tactics at Twilight", steampunk Scottish style though written well before *The Difference Engine* hit the streets. Glasgow is the hub of a British Empire founded on Newcombean science and religious orthodoxy; Fordyce is a dissident academic in disgrace, and accompanied by Commission Officer Maguire for the final stage of his journey into exile on the Faroe Islands. Beneath the trappings of steamcrawlers and navigable air-fortresses there is a weighty philosophical tussle between the two men that threatens to unbalance the narrative, but Cobley rescues the story with a powerful conclusion as Fordyce makes a final attempt at defiance.

Different again is Veronica Colin's "On the Other Side". Scottish independence has merely created a false economy of "theme parks and nature trails and wild Highlanders acting out Culloden for tourists", and the only work for riggers is on the wells in Antarctica. In the midst of this, an ex-pat rich English woman finds she still has a lot to learn about those less fortunate than herself. This story was placed fourth in a recent

Sunday Times SF competition, and deserved the recognition, with the dialogue in particular being very tight and believable.

The Unusual Genitals Party also sports the 1989 winner of the *Glasgow Herald* SF competition, "In the Dark Time" by Elsie M. Donald. Regarding a time traveller who is perhaps too zealous in his attempts to cover his tracks, it is more traditional in its approach than some of the other stories, and is a very readable and well-rounded piece.



Starting as an innocuous description of tribal rites, Gerry Morton's "Rattlesnake Meets Crow" swiftly develops through the interaction of Rattlesnake, the historian, and his defiant young protégée Little River, into an exploration of guilt and inadequacy, and Rattlesnake's eventual self-discovery. Crow's intervention at the end like one of von Däniken's aliens, in turn lifts this story to new and unexplored reaches. At eight pages this is by far the longest and certainly the most demanding piece in the collection, but at the same time, one of the most rewarding.

In a collection of such high quality I'd be hard pushed to name a favourite, but "Out of the West" by Richard Hammersley would probably be the one. Combining Amerindian mysticism, social documentary and quasi-religious experience in a sequence of independent episodes, it builds to create the uplifting sensation that some fundamental knowledge lies just outside the reader's comprehension. You read it again to try and make it more tangible but, to borrow from the story, each time "you try to grab it – it's gone like a saxophone busker's melody". A most extraordinary piece of writing.

But it's unfair on the other writers to single out just one item when all the stories really do deserve to have been published. There's not many anthologies by well-known authors can make that claim, which makes this collection of new fiction by essentially new writers all the more exciting. The breadth of scope and content found here indicates a strength of talent at the grass roots level that is extremely heartening for those who despair at the substandard output of so many 'professional outfits'. You might scoff at the 'city of culture', but work of this calibre indicates that Glasgow's the city to watch. ❑

babies from now on will be male. Or, to ensure that they will all be female. One must be better than the other, but which? He muses on the feminine and masculine feelings within him in his feelingless way. Other readers have been shocked that Blumlein's narrator 'proves' that men and women are different; but to this reviewer the stand-out theme is that the narrator is a factoid junkie, hooked on historical hearsay and experiments on the brains of rats. In this respect he is the equivalent of Phil Dick's Jack Isidore in "Confessions of a Crap Artist" – unable to understand people, but always able to tell you what they are about, and quote from a journal to back up his position. The story is disturbing but mildly interesting, like having your ear talked off by the mad person on the top deck of the bus.

In *Interzone* #45, Simon Ings says that "any fan who has drawn more lasting understanding of the human condition from drinking with a writer than from reading the writer's books is reading the wrong books". I disagree, and in a little tale that proves me right and wrong at the same time is "Interview with C.W." (from *New Pathways* #10), an interview with an imaginary writer which opens up a vista of unwritten books and rootless commentary on same; quite successful, in the same way that Ballard's "The Index" (an index to an imaginary biography) is successful. Another Ballard parallel is in "The Promise of Warmth" in which a man is regressed by the oppressive heat of a seaside holiday resort until he becomes an iguana! (Does Blumlein do all this on purpose?) In "The Domino Master", an (abused?) child enters the apartment next door where fantasy and escape (or maybe death) await. In "The Glitter and the Glamour" an old leading actor, his good looks artificially prolonged, continues to court the leading ladies. Physically he is in good shape, but his psyche is moribund and he is useless to them and to himself.

"Drown Yourself" is a not-bad attempt at cyberpunk, beginning "Johnny Jukes knew the woman was an android". Though ass-kicking and Gibsonian, this telegraphs the ending badly. "Bestseller" is a re-run of the old joke "I've had this broom for twenty-five years – all it's needed has been two new heads and a handle", except this is about organ donation for money. It's well written, which is a good thing, because it's not very original. *2000 AD* told almost the same story in 27 panels, and had a few laughs on the way. (Prog 643, "The Foreign Model".) And "The Thing Itself" is the story of two lovers, one of whom is doomed to die. This is mainly remarkable for summing itself up wrongly in the introduction: "There are lessons in this story. Particular ones and universal. A video is forthcoming."

I was a little disappointed by this collection. There's a general aura of plotlessness which goes well with the flattened affect, but leaves me unsatisfied. The plotted stories, like "Drown Yourself", are a bit squibby. However, in the future, whether Blumlein tends towards the 'condensed novel' of his literary precursor, Ballard, or whether he heads for a bit of skiffy plotting, with its infodumps and McGuffins, is immaterial. The general weirdness of his prose – his unique, inhuman viewpoint – will take him a long way in either.

Lyle Hopwood ❑

HOW TO WRITE TALES OF HORROR, FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION
edited by J.N. Williamson

Robinson, ISBN 1 85487 078 5.
242pp, £4:99

This is less a "How to Write ..." book than a "How to Write, Read and Appreciate What You're Reading" type book. Thankfully, it's not split into distinct sections for horror, fantasy and SF, but mixes the essays so that "Science Fiction: Hard Science and Hard Conflict" by Michael A. Banks is next to "Sword and Sorcery, Dragon and Princess" by Darrell Schweitzer.

The basic premise of running order does group the 27 essays into getting ideas in various genres, how to develop them, and lastly, when you have developed them, how to get your work published. At the end of the book there are top-ten favourite novel and

short story listings by numerous well-known authors, as well as a recommended general reading index.

This is not an easy book to read, and almost impossible to get through in one sitting. So many writers expressing opinions, often in great detail, and often repeating each other. In some cases there are contradictions, the classic example being William F. Nolan's opening paragraph acid test for good stories (in "Involving *Your* Reader from the Start"), which is shot down by "Putting it on the Editor's Desk" by Alan Rodgers: "Well, getting the reader's interest right away *is* important, but the idea that the story's first sentence should somehow have all the properties of good ad copy has led to more garishly stupid openings than I want to think about."

The emphasis appears to be on long rather than short fiction, but the basic advice remains sound. You can't be original unless you are aware of what has already been written; yes, you can imitate the style of your favourite authors but this is something you'll have to grow out of eventually. James Kisner, Ray Bradbury and Ramsey Campbell all recommend this method of developing as a writer.

Also very useful are the essays by Mary T. Williamson, Alan Rodgers and Patrick LoBrutto, who deal with the nuts and bolts of manuscript submission – how many ways can you interpret "double-spacing"! – and portraying editors as more than subhuman for a change.

There is, however, one very substantial fault with this book – it's a reprint of a book first published in the USA four years ago. Unfortunately, the British publishers have not made any attempt to update the contents, so the market listing of suitable outlets for speculative fiction is way out of date, and totally inappropriate for British readers. Not even *Interzone* or *Fear* are mentioned!

Nonetheless, there is still plenty of worthwhile information to be gained. The whole book is like a crash course in reading and appreciating Horror, Fantasy and Science Fiction, with many of the contributors showing examples of other writers' work to illustrate their point. Beware the vocal minority who are simply along for the ego trip – they're easy to spot when they state "this is what I did in *my* widely published work that is *so* effective", or recommend their own books as essential reading! The great majority do care about their contribution, don't patronise the reader, and genuinely hope that others may benefit from their experience.

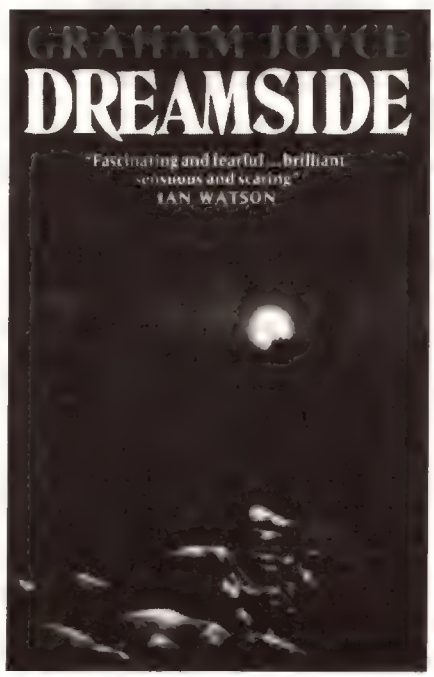
The back cover blurb proclaims that reading these essays will tell you "how to write powerfully and professionally for profit". If that's all you're after, go no further than Robert Bloch's introduction for the instant formula for fast bucks: "Get a premise, any kind of premise you can beg, borrow or steal; blow it up into the biggest book or the longest series you can manage. Substitute sex for substance and violence for vitality, and God bless".

Bearing in mind that it's written for an American market and it's four years out of date, *How to Write Tales of ...* still offers solid advice for developing writers, and for readers with an interest in what they read, too. It's no substitute for good workshop feedback on your own stories, but should nonetheless help avoid fundamental mistakes and improve the effectiveness of your writing, be it for profit, or simply for pleasure. ❑

The dream ticket

DREAMSIDE by Graham Joyce

Pan, ISBN 0 330 31339 8. 248pp, £4:50



At first glance this is a novel purely about four students, Brad, Ella, Honora and Lee, who participate in a research programme into lucid dreaming. With the help of their professor they learn how to control their dreams and eventually rendezvous on "Dreamside". When we join them 13 years later, the dreams have returned, but this time the four are no longer in control.

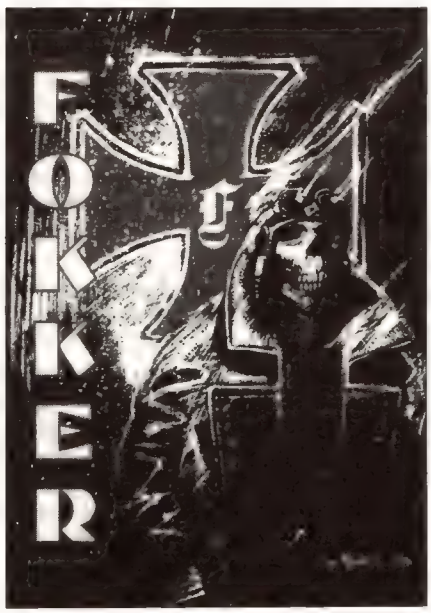
It's a simple enough storyline on its own, but Graham Joyce also uses it to explore group as well as dream psychology, and to highlight the danger of obsession. Most obviously, this is seen in the group's obsession with "Dreamside", but also in the professor's addiction to his work, and Lee and Brad's obsession with Ella. Later, haunted by the aftereffects of the Dreamside experience, addiction mutates into other forms as Brad turns to drink and Honora to sleeping pills.

Graham Joyce brings these obsessions and the group interactions more closely into focus by dividing the main characters into four distinct personality types. Lee is always described as solid and dependable, for example, while Ella is the constant dynamic force and object of desire. The author is careful not to let this degenerate into stereotype by maintaining a fast pace throughout the book. In the same way, he prevents the detailed theory of dream psychology from overpowering the novel, by introducing each stage as the plot develops.

The pace of the narrative is buoyed by a keen attention to detail – places, cars, what Ella's wearing this chapter, and Lee and Ella's sexual experimentation. There's also a lot left unsaid, being left to the reader to infer from the different narrative points of view. Sometimes though, the multiple viewpoint leads to unnecessary repetition of the obvious, so the professor notes to himself the state of the relationships within the group, and later Honora on Dreamside reiterates exactly the same point.

Similarly, the distinct personality types of the characters do help maintain continuity across the flashbacks. At the same time, however, there is little evidence that they have acquired an older perspective in that period, despite ample description that they now *look* older.

Dreamside does have its weaknesses, but for the most part these are things that will disappear as Graham Joyce gains in experience. In the meantime, there's more than enough here to keep the pages turning, making *Dreamside* an impressive and highly recommended debut. ❑



Fokking marvellous!

FOKKER #1

A4, 44pp, £1:45 + 32p p&p from Dead Head Comics, 44 Victoria Street, Edinburgh

Glasgow might have it sewn up in the fiction stakes with those *Unusual Genitals*, but over on the east coast they're not twiddling their thumbs either.

With comics thriving in Scotland at the moment, *Fokker* is the most exciting of the new crop I've seen so far. Inside the classy black/gold cover, five strips run through a whole range of styles, from the cyber-romp of "Hud" to the hypnotic metamorphoses of "Tired of Waiting" and the near fine-art crossover of "The Tale of Man-TV".

The artwork is excellent throughout, with a very clean layout that leaves the content room to breathe, so that *Fokker* seems to exude a confidence and self-assurance often missing from better-established magazines.

This is an impressive first issue, impressive enough to make me want to subscribe. What better recommendation? ❑

DEMENTIA 13 #5

A4, 52pp, £1:75 + 44p stamp from Dementia 13, 17 Pinewood Avenue, Sidcup, Kent DA15 8BB

Editor Pam Creais refers to her publication as a fanzine rather than a fictionzine or small press magazine, and this is an honest description of what you get for your money. The production is basic: single photocopied sheets stapled at the edge, but the print is clear and readable.

There are eleven stories this issue, three(!) of them by the ubiquitous Des Lewis. Other contributors are less familiar to me (William Smith, Joel Lane, Daniel Buck), but their offerings are nonetheless entertaining. A lack of polish is evident in most of the pieces but ideas and enthusiasm are abundant. I particularly enjoyed (if that is the right word) Steve Hutchison's "Friend of a Friend", guaranteed to turn most stomachs.

The quality of the artwork varies widely, from poor to very good; the best being the sharp, comic-book style of John Florendo, and a magnificent full-page illo by Stephen Skwarek which is reminiscent of those medieval woodcuts that often grace books on occult matters.

Pam Creais's love of the macabre, weirdly erotic and plain strange comes across very strongly in *Dementia 13*. Her editorial space is devoted to singing the praises of other magazines which may interest her readers. Unfortunately there is no subscription service, as the editor doesn't want to feel obliged to produce the magazine to a strict schedule. Personally I think this is a shame ... because I like it.

Rick Cadger ❑

EXUBERANCE #2

A4, 64pp, £1:75 (4/£6:50) from Jason Smith, 34 Croft Close, Chipperfield, Herts WD4 9PA

At first sight *Exuberance* impresses; it is big, bold and glossy. Editor Jason Smith obviously takes his magazine very seriously, and anyone who reads it is likely to do the same. The first issue set very high standards for a small press debut, and those standards have been maintained for this second issue, and in some ways perhaps even bettered. The page count has increased over last time, and the internal design is coming along nicely.

Seven stories this time, three of them by authors who were in the line up of the launch issue. Several of the names will be familiar to regular small press readers: Miles Hadfield for example, and Andy Darlington whose contribution here is rather weaker than work he's done in the past. The most promising though is "Starr Night" by newcomer Paul Reed. For a young writer (21 years old) Reed has a confident, readable and atmospheric style which should establish him as a name to watch out for as his talent develops.

There is a single book review – a substantial and enthusiastic overview by Craig Turner (who also has a story in this issue) which made me want to read the book concerned, even though it is of a subgenre that doesn't usually appeal to me.

The artwork in *Exuberance* has already won wide praise, and rightly so. Here we have the unmistakable work of Dreyfus illustrating both fiction and page headings. However, the two stars (as in the first issue) are Roger and Russell Morgan whose works are as different as they are excellent.

Overall I think it is true to say that *Exuberance* has great potential, and if it continues to deliver such good value it could be one of the few long term survivors in a very competitive field.

Rick Cadger ❑

R.E.M #1

A4, 52pp, (4/£7) from R.E.M Publications, 19 Sandringham Road, London NW2 5EP

So *R.E.M* has finally made it to publication, and Arthur Straker has managed to prove the doubters wrong at last. The line-up is basically as advertised last summer, though without Andy Sawyer's reviews and the artwork of Izzy Bricknall and Robotnik.

Simon Ings' "Hothead", a novella condensed from the forthcoming eponymous novel, had me hooked from the start with its story of Inès, a space-farer who gets caught up in a conspiracy of exploitation and illegal hardware upon her return to Earth. Despite losing some cohesion in the middle and having a very twee ending, it's a highly entertaining story which should appeal to fans of early Lyle Hopwood.

By comparison, Eric Brown's "Star of Epsilon" is another Nirvana-through-nada-continuum tale, thinner on plot than usual and not one of his best in this setting; "To Be Alone Together" by Keith Brooke and "Byzantium" by Matthew Dickens are rather uninspired and don't add very much to their existing body of work.

Andrew Ferguson's "Replicator", though, is an enjoyable account of how an alien takes over an estate agent (!) to further its

own reproductive ends. "Marbleye in Midnight Black", Michael Cobley's cyber-schizo-post-holocaust story first published two years ago in the Canadian magazine *Edge Detector*, still thoroughly deserves the wider exposure afforded by its first UK publication here.

In his editorial, Arthur Straker states that *R.E.M* is intended as an alternative to *Interzone*, even though five of the seven stories in this issue are by *Interzone* contributors. Nonetheless, it is pleasing to see the work of these writers presented in a lively and imaginative fashion. Computer-enhanced photos abound, and most of the stories receive the extravagant treatment of two distinct title pages.

However, a high-class desktop publishing kit does not create a graphic designer overnight, no matter how much enthusiasm the operator might have. Thankfully it's not a case of the classic "I've got 35 typefaces and I'm going to use them on every page", but you have to learn fast that white text on a pale grey background, for example, is essentially unreadable.

Elsewhere, a call-out obscures the text that it illustrates, and the hyphenation is generally horrendous throughout. Call this 'first issue blues' if you like, but these are still careless errors that should have been corrected in the extra 12 months taken to prepare the magazine.

As it is, much of the non-fiction and most of the adverts are now completely out of date, even though I'm sure the contributors and advertisers concerned would have been pleased to provide revised copy if requested.

Ultimately, the question must remain: has *R.E.M* been worth the wait? If you've been hoping for a magazine that gives *Interzone* fiction with more imaginative design, then the answer is a definite yes. Otherwise, for this reviewer at least, it doesn't really come up to expectations. ❑

WORKS #7

A5, 52pp + 12pp *Works Study* review supplement, £1:60 (4/£5:50) from Dave W. Hughes. 12 Blakestones Road, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5UQ

This issue of *Works* sees editor Dave W. Hughes going it alone once again. Assistant editors may come and go, but Dave always seems most comfortable when there's just him at the helm.

The cover is stunning. Kev Cullen's superlative illustration combined with the textured, colour-washed covers that *Works* has adopted, is enough to take your breath away. Inside, the print quality has improved over the slightly fuzzy typeface of #6, and the illustrations are also more sharply reproduced. Productionwise, only the layout of headings and graphics is anything less than professional.

Top billing goes to Ian Watson, whose contribution here is far better than some of the weak (sometimes insultingly so) material he's dumped on the small press in the past. The editor is a champion of experimental fiction, but this in no way seems to blind him to what is entertaining, and there are some real crackers this time around. Steve Widdowson's "The Dose" is a dose of weird tragedy that positively demands a second reading, as do Mark Haw's "Strange Attractor", and David Curl's "Living in Suburbia". The last of these is weakened by a trendy reference to police brutality, but it is nevertheless an exciting piece of writing. There is also the usual exemplary artwork, notable examples being by Andy Watkins and Alan Hunter.

Add to all this a twelve page, typeset supplement crammed with reviews and gossip, and what you have is unbeatable value. If you find reviews that end with the words "essential reading" nauseating, prepare to puke. Essential reading.

Rick Cadger ❑

"... I read it with the usual mixture of fascination, admiration, irritation, and exasperation."
—Robert Silverberg

SCIENCE FICTION eye

"... too much content for the money..."
"A color cover and complex graphics are wasted on a critical magazine."
—Locus

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INTERZONE #47

A4, 72pp, £2:25 (12/£26) from 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU

» **What is *Interzone* doing in the Stateside section of BBR *Review*?**

This is the special issue of material exchanged from the American magazine *Aboriginal SF*. Most people are familiar with *Interzone*, but for many this will be their first exposure to *Aboriginal*.

» **So what is *Aboriginal*?**

"A magazine published by a handful of people who care deeply about science fiction short stories, which has grown slowly but now has a paid circulation of 22,000 (18,000 of whom are subscribers)and has become the fourth largest professional SF/fantasy magazine in the United States."

» **Who does it publish?**

As well as presenting stories from established names, it takes great pride in discovering new talent, and saying who has gone on to be famous having first been published in *Aboriginal*.

» **So it's the American version of *Interzone*?**

To that extent, yes.

» **Is this a reasonable example of *Aboriginal*?**

They would like us to think so. In this issue the established writers are represented by Harlan Ellison and Frederick Pohl; the "discoveries" by Wil McCarthy, M. Alan Clarkson and Gary W. Mitchell, who all made their first pro sale to *Aboriginal*.

» **How does the fiction compare to a regular *Interzone*?**

If anything, this is the strongest *Interzone* for some time, though the quality is more varied than usual. Gary W. Mitchell's and M. Alan Clarkson's "Like a Flithiss from its Shell" is the best story *Interzone* have published all year, wonderfully portraying a manic alien wake and a human who is too clever for his own good.

At the other end of the scale, Harlan Ellison's "Darkness Upon the Face of the Deep" is a contrived story peopled by two-dimensional stereotypes, and very disappointing. Every writer has an off-day but this is hardly the place for it. "The Matter of Beaupré" by Frederick Pohl is a lightweight extrapolation, more a fleshed-out idea than a story; at least he had the sense to keep it short.

In the midground, Lois Tilton's "The Cry of the Seagull", Wil McCarthy's "Amerikano Hiaika" and Lawrence Watt-Evans' "Targets" are solid, well-rounded stories.

At first I wondered if *Interzone* subscribers would appreciate a different magazine thrust at them like this, but David Pringle has chosen his bedfellow with care, and does not overly test the faith of his readers with *Aboriginal's* fiction.

» **Does *Aboriginal* have the same range of non-fiction?**

Yes, there are media and book review columns, and also a popular science feature. Whilst the book reviews by Darrell Schweitzer and Janice M. Eisen are informed and perceptive, the other non-fiction fails to impress. For example, the media column by Susan Ellison (wife of Harlan) is little more than a compilation of trade press releases; the accumulated contributor biographies, and the alien-masquerading-as-publisher (the ET lookalike) just left me cringing with embarrassment.

» **What does *Aboriginal* have that *Interzone* doesn't?**

Full colour interior illustrations. *Aboriginal* has apparently taken the lead in the US by using full colour artwork for the stories, and the "luxurious novelty" is reproduced here for *Interzone* readers.

Unfortunately the economics of colour printing mean that the illustrations are grouped in pairs on predetermined pages. As the artwork can't be used to break up the text in the normal fashion, the internal design is even less imaginative than usual for *Interzone*.

Another unfortunate side effect is that the artwork sometimes doesn't even appear with the story it's supposed to complement, totally negating any potential enhancement of the fiction. To judge from a reader's letter, *Aboriginal* does manage to keep the artwork with the fiction, but only by splitting the stories with a "continued on page x", hardly a reader-friendly alternative.

Frankly though, I can't see what all the fuss is about. The colour artwork is nothing much to write home about, even if some of it is by C.J. Cherryh's kid brother. *Interzone*'s regular artists produce illustrations of far greater scope, imagination and quality just by working in black and white.

» **Has the *Interzone/Aboriginal* swap been a worthwhile project?**

In that David Pringle is actively encouraging his readers to experiment with magazines other than *Interzone*, then yes.

In that access to future editions is made easier by providing a UK contact address for *Aboriginal* subscriptions, then yes.

» **Or is it just a cunning plan to increase *Interzone's* US circulation?**

Perhaps. But that's no bad thing either.

» **Does it make you want to subscribe to *Aboriginal*?**

When *Aboriginal* and *Interzone* are so close in terms of pitch and content, the attraction of subscribing to simply more of the same is rather elusive.

As a prospectus for *Aboriginal*, this issue of *Interzone* does few favours for its US counterpart; the fiction and the artwork should have been very much stronger. Compared to *R.E.M*, *protoStellar*, and even *Million*, this does seem a rather half-hearted attempt to launch a new product onto the market. ❑

He's *dead*, Jim?

THE PHILIP K. DICK SOCIETY NEWSLETTER #25

A4, 20pp, 3/$l6 from PKDS, Box 611, Glen Ellen CA 95442, or 3/£3:50 surface (£6 airmail) from Keith Bowden, 47 Park Avenue, Barking, Essex IG11 8QU (payable to 'The Philip K. Dick Society')

This issue of the *PKDS Newsletter* sees co-editor Andy Watson departing to concentrate on a revamped *Journal Wired*, leaving the society in the capable hands of Paul Williams.

By far the biggest article in #25 is by Williams, concerning the *I Ching* and Phil's copy in particular with the notes he left with it. There's also a reprint of a *L.A. Weekly* article by Steve Erickson on the man, a bizarre dream episode from Robin Rule, and a review of *Total Recall* by John Shirley. On top of that you have the usual news column with publishing updates and other pieces of info (there's always a surprisingly large amount of it). The only reservation that I have about this issue is that the rare PKD material is not as potent as it has been in previous issues.

The *PKDS* is not an uncritical fan club – but it is essential reading for anyone interested in one of SF's leading writers. It must also have one of the best mailing lists about. Amongst the people who have had contributions or letters in previous issues are Tim Powers, Luke McGuff, K.W. Jeter, Thomas M. Disch, James Blaylock, Ferret, Robert Crumb, Ted White, Terry Carr, Rudy Rucker ... need I continue? Luckily all back issues are kept in print.

Jim Steel ❑

Biopunk and revolution

WILD SHARKAAAH #1-2

Contact Eva Hauser, Na Cihadle 55, 16000 Praha 6, Czechoslovakia

Increased contact with the West and improved mobility of ideas is already having an effect on Czech fandom, with the semi-pro fiction magazine *Ikarie* taking the lead in importing fiction by foreign writers. Eva Hauser travelled last year to the Worldcon in Holland and Eurocon in France to acquire stories for *Ikarie*. We were pleased to meet her at this year's Eastercon in Glasgow when she was talking to British writers. Eva is also a respected author in her own right, and won the 1988 Karel Capek award for her story "In Our State of Agony".

Her experience as a writer and editor makes her a pivotal figure in Prague fandom, and gives her a unique viewpoint that is reflected in *Wild Sharkaaah*. This is definitely a 'personalzine' but it has none of the soul-searching or 'what-I-did-this-weekend' elements of the western variety.

While her compatriots are still celebrating the free elections, for example, Eva is already looking ahead to the environmental implications of the new market economy. She doubts that Czech industry will give green matters the slightest consideration in their rush for new prosperity.

In *Wild Sharkaaah* #2, Eva asks what use is cyberpunk in a country where you can't even find a functioning public telephone box. In an attempt to define a literature more appropriate for her country, she comes up with Biopunk, where mutants, genetic diseases and chimeric organisms take the place of computers, programs and viruses. This is no empty polemic, however, but a fascinating rationalisation of the motivation behind Eva's own fiction.

As a woman, mother and intellectual it's no surprise that Eva devotes considerable space to feminist topics, but the eastern bloc heritage provides a major difference: under communism, there is no mention of the 'traditional' family of submissive housewives and bread-winning husbands against which western feminists react most strongly. Instead:

"Our women are persuaded that they must manage everything – family, household, career – and they do manage it. They are not dependent on men much – excluding perhaps the period when the children are really very small and they can't be put into kindergarten ... Women are self-sufficient, they don't submit themselves to men. They don't need men much – men are becoming unnecessary 'parasites' in the family. Thus, it's more problem of men's role in family and in life, than of women's role. Do Czechoslovakian women need the feminist movement? Yes, but not the radical and angry one. What damages the feminism most in our eyes, is its grim seriousness, lack of sense of humour; there is no fun in feminism."

Wild Sharkaaah is one of the most challenging and exciting publications I have read for a long time. Eva Hauser writes with honest enthusiasm and packs in enough ideas to keep other writers busy for years. What she tells us in *Wild Sharkaaah* is ample demonstration that, although the eastern bloc may feel they have so much to learn from the west, there's an awful lot they can teach us in return. ❑

FANDOM NEWSLETTER #36/37 (Jan 1991)

A4, 64pp, DM8/£3/$6

FANDOM NEWSLETTER #38 (Feb 1991)

A4, 44pp, DM4/£1.50/$3 from Matthias Hofmann, Kirchbergstrasse 14, D-7800 Freiberg i.Br., Germany

Fandom Newsletter is the monthly journal of the Science Fiction Club Deutschland, the German equivalent of the BSFA, and gives wide coverage to most areas of SF activity.

There are regular columns to round up the latest films, comics and fanzines, updates on Perry Rhodan's latest exploits, a convention calendar and convention reports, plus publishing news and a comprehensive book review section that can if required form a separate 12-page pull-out to the main magazine.

On top of all that, the two issues here between them pack in extensive articles on Dan Simmons and H.P. Lovecraft, and a lengthy interview with John Brunner.

I can't comment on the *quality* of the content, though in terms of scope I suppose the nearest British equivalent is *Critical Wave*. However, *FNL* has the added benefit of professional typesetting and loads of photographs courtesy of *Stellvertretender Chefredakteur* Thomas Recktenwald.

With the status in Germany that *Vector* seems to enjoy at home, *FNL* must be the obvious starting point for anyone wanting to investigate German SF further. ❑

SIVULLINEN ARTCORE

Contact Jouni Wääräkangas, Kaarelantie 86.B.28, 00420 Helsinki, Finland

Jouni Wääräkangas' artwork has graced the pages of *IDOMO*, *The Scanner* and early **BBR**s. More recently he has been increasingly involved with grass roots and underground poetry and publishing activities, with his network of contacts extending well into Britain and the USA.

In addition to producing his own magazine *Sivullinen*, Jouni also generates a whole range of spin-off A6 size booklets involving his contributors. Poems and lyrics come from performance artists like Chris Caggiano, Paul Weinman, Rick Hudson and Bob Z. The latter is a punk poet whose stand against the New York flyposting laws has resulted in more than $22,000 in fines and the support of Jello Biafra and Allen Ginsberg.

The rawness and enthusiasm for the message more than compensate for the sometimes rough and ready production, though for only $1 (or equivalent) you can't complain.

Also in this batch are two A5 portfolios of Jouni's own artwork, *Faces* and *War Inside My Head*, at $1 each. They carry the byline that the illustrations may be freely used anywhere, so long as Jouni receives a copy of the magazine, record sleeve or whatever. By offering this artists' equivalent of shareware, these booklets certainly merit the attention of any editors needing a boost in the artwork department.

Perhaps the best deal of all are his postcards, of which there's a fantastic selection. At 30 cards for $5 they're excellent value, and ideal for livening up your correspondence. ❑

KONTAKT #1–3

Contact Ladislav Peška, PO Box 19, 27401 Slang, Czechoslovakia

INFOSFERA

Contact Gediminas Beresnevicius, Antakalnio 65-33, Vilnius 232040, Lithuania, USSR

British fandom has been around for so long that nowadays fanzines tend to deal more with the culture of fandom and the social life of fans than with the literature that originally inspired them. As a result, the apparent cliquishness of many fanzines – especially those dubbed 'personalzines' – is extremely offputting to the casual reader or those not involved in fandom.

Elsewhere in Europe, however, the fanzine seems to keep SF as the focal point, with many produced at club level for the consumption of members. News, articles, comment and reviews are the staple diet, together with convention reports and items of general interest. The German *Fandom Newsletter* is an example of this, elevated to a national level.

For fans in eastern Europe the political regime has been an overriding factor. Not only has the language barrier hindered communication with the English-speaking SF community, but the state has dictated the legality of fan organisations, further hampering activity. *Kontakt* reports that the principal Czech fan club, the SF Club Villoidus, has only just celebrated its 10th anniversary; similarly *infoSFera* notes that the Vilnius-based club Dorado, the oldest in Lithuania, also recently marked its first decade of activities.

East European fans are naturally eager to catch up with the rest of the world now that restrictions have been relaxed, and fanzines are still the main source of imported fiction in translation. But they are also keen to establish their countries within the global SF community, which is why these fanzines are published in English – in the case of *infoSFera*, as a special edition. Both magazines carry articles on the history of fandom in their countries, and overviews of SF in various media that show they've not been inactive in their isolation.

With the political climate affecting fans so personally, though, it is natural that the move toward democracy should figure largely in the fanzines. A long article in *infoSFera* relates the involvement of a former member of the Dorado club in the Lithuanian Reconstruction Movement Sajudis, the main political opposition to the Communist Party. In *Kontakt* Lad'a Peška talks of standing in the elections in Czechoslovakia.

For those of us in the West, the concept of revolution is as distant as the most fantastic fiction. It is only when, also in *Kontakt*, Eva Hauser can talk of attending a Prague fan club meeting in one paragraph and in the next describe taking part in the ½-million strong demonstrations in Wenseslas Square, that we can begin to comprehend the enormity of its effect on everyday life.

The fans behind *Kontakt* and *infoSFera* are keen to make contact with their colleagues around the world – if you're keen to swap ideas and interests, why not get in touch? ❑

Special thanks to Cyril Simsa for providing the information on Czechoslovakian SF.

COMING NEXT ISSUE:

In BBR #20 ❑ New fiction by ❑ Tim Nickels ❑ Roger Thomas ❑ Gabriel de Anda ❑ Artwork by ❑ Dreyfus ❑ Anne Stephens ❑ Smallpiece Whitmore ❑ Plus ❑ *Mogollón News* ❑ **BBR** *Review*

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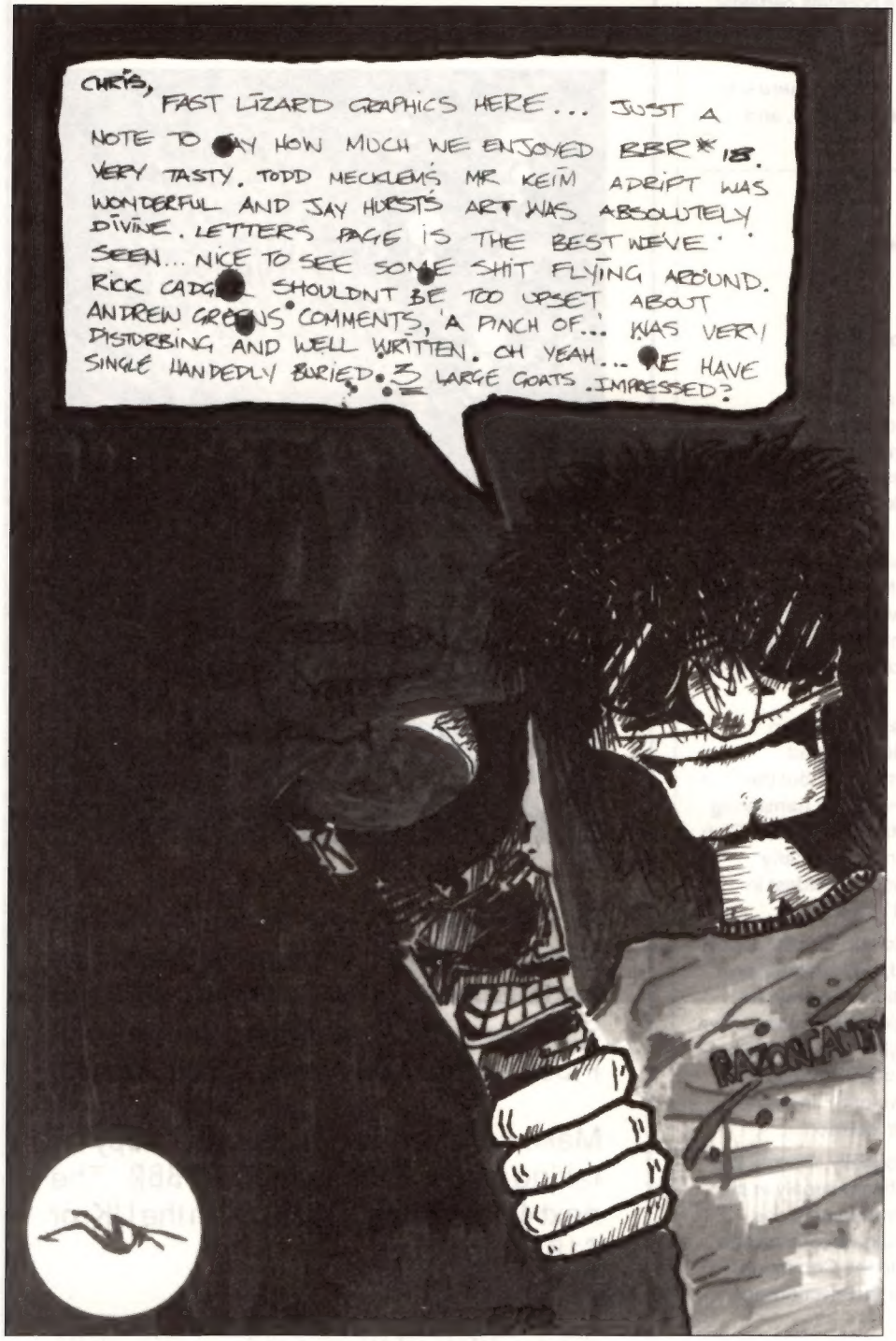

CHRIS,
FAST LIZARD GRAPHICS HERE... JUST A NOTE TO SAY HOW MUCH WE ENJOYED BBR#18. VERY TASTY. TODD MECKLEM'S MR KEIM ADRIFT WAS WONDERFUL AND JAY HURST'S ART WAS ABSOLUTELY DIVINE. LETTERS PAGE IS THE BEST WE'VE SEEN... NICE TO SEE SOME SHIT FLYING AROUND. RICK CADGER SHOULDN'T BE TOO UPSET ABOUT ANDREW GREENS COMMENTS, 'A PINCH OF...' WAS VERY DISTURBING AND WELL WRITTEN. OH YEAH... WE HAVE SINGLE HANDEDLY BURIED 3 LARGE GOATS. IMPRESSED?

From: Andrew (Dreyfus) Caines, Bangor

Thanks for **BBR** #18. Very surprised to see my letter. In general I think I agree with myself – but I would like to point out to myself that I actually own one of the *Incunabula* items – "Chaos" by James Gleick.

I've only glanced through **BBR** so can't comment but the Kevin Cullen artwork & poster are fantastic – real knockout, I'm really looking forward to the David Hast (I loved "Crimewatcher") & the Uncle River piece looks v. interesting/intriguing. Keep up the unexpected – **BBR** is very 'groovy' at the moment, I hope you can cross over from the rather small SF readership into wider appeal.

Glad to see your positive review of *perChance*. RPG is definitely a creative force, allowing people to create at their own level, it is interactive storytelling. ❑

From: Miles Hadfield, Southport

Thanks for **BBR** #18; not one of your greatest, but an enjoyable read and well up to par. *Mogollón News* was especially notable; quite charming and delightful and why couldn't I think of it first?

I enjoyed all of the fiction, in particular the Borges/Kafkaesque "Mr Keim Adrift". My only gripe is that whilst Richard Kadrey's "... 3rd Symphony" had great ideas, it was, unfortunately, too accurate a parody of what is an unreadably dull species of writing. Writers can so easily outsmart themselves. The rest of it was all good solid stuff that we can expect from these writers and from **BBR**. Nice to see a writer like Moorcock taking it seriously, and also nice to hear that *New Worlds* may come back. About bloody time; it should never have gone away.

OK, a couple of points. Firstly, the matter of Rick Cadger's "A Pinch Of". What disturbed me about Andrew Green's response to the story was his last sentence, which seems to call for censorship. A story which takes pains to offend no-one is bland – not that one should seek to offend for the hell of it, of course – and in the quest for something worthwhile, writers will inevitably make mistakes, sometimes, and go too far. That said, perhaps Green has a point. In films ranging from *Rollerball* to *The Accused*, their makers can easily be accused of exploiting what they seek to condemn, simply in order to win audiences. Perhaps Cadger is guilty of this. However, it was all described in such clinical detail that I was left feeling rather ill and so with me at least he succeeded; as such the conventional telling was a help rather than a hindrance, although maybe I still prefer John Brunner's more avant garde precursor, "Nobody Axed You".

Secondly, J.F. Haines' letter. Is there a hint of SF ghetto in this? The 'literary world' does *not* "value only 'realism'" – see Peter Carey, Salman Rushdie, Doris Lessing, Franz Kafka, Gogol, Paul Auster and countless others for evidence of this. The literary world seems to like Ballard and Vonnegut, amongst others from our little clique. If only the suspicion towards the big wide world out there is relaxed a little, perhaps we'd be better off and maybe the writing would improve. Not to mention that writers such as Moorcock, Aldiss and Ballard all seem to have done the best of their recent work outside the genre, finding new inspiration there, perhaps. A cosmopolitan attitude is good for us all. I'm not accusing Haines of lacking this, let me stress; it's just a note that crept into his letter. He is quite right that a lot of people do look down unfairly on genre fiction – not just SF; but then, as Sturgeon said, at least 90% of it is utter crap and deserves it. ❑

From: Simon Amos, Tonbridge

I've just finished reading the letters column of **BBR** #18 and felt moved to write.

Incunabula: fact, fiction or what? Personally, I don't know and I don't really care – deciding what I'm to think of *Incunabula* as would take away some of the thrill of disorientation you talk about. Whatever it is, *Incunabula* is as memorable a piece of work as any you've published ... at least, *I* think so!

John Francis Haines' comments about eliminating "wrong-headed thinking" among the "small press SF community" is a little worrying. I'd rather have a difference of opinion about something we both enjoy (ie the "small press") rather than a consensus that everyone is happy with. Lets *all* get out there and invite the hostile literary world in; show them how peaceful it is! ❑

From: David Logan, Co. Antrim

BBR #18 was weak. Mecklem's "Mr Keim" story, and O'Driscoll's "Shaft", were reasonably entertaining. Hast's "Midwife" was okay; but Kadrey and Moorcock really did **BBR** no favours at all.

I fell asleep while reading Kadrey's "Luchenko" and Moorcock's "Romanian Question" had me, frankly, bamboozled. Maybe I'm flaunting my ignorance, maybe these are complex works of great art (though I doubt it) but shouldn't writing be for the readers? In other words, shouldn't good writing be writing that the readers can enjoy? Contrast the Moorcock piece with Cadger's "A Pinch of ... " in **BBR** #17 (which I note came in for some stick). The Cadger story entertained. It was reader oriented. The Moorcock story did not entertain. It was a writer centred slice of egocentricity.

I like what you say in the editorial about innovation and originality; the "thrill of disorientation" too. But **BBR** will fail if the stories don't entertain, no matter how "artistic" they may be. ❑

From: Kev P. McVeigh, editor *Vector*, Milnthorpe, Cumbria

I've just read, or re-read, the past four issues and there are only two stories out of 20 (or 22 counting *Mogollón News* and *Incunabula*) that I disliked – D.F. Lewis' "Madge", and Michael Moorcock's "The Romanian Question." The former was lightweight and clumsily written, and like most of the author's work I've seen, in need of editorial guidance. The latter didn't have those faults, it just seemed self-indulgent, out of date, and pointless.

The rest, however, was excellent. Paul Di Fillippo's "Fleshflowers" avoided unnecessary rehashing of its direct prequel "Skintwister" (*F&SF*, March 86), whilst Richard Kadrey's story reminded me of the brilliant, and criminally ignored Carter Scholz. I'm already a fan of Nicholas Royle and will now be looking out for more by Mike O'Driscoll too. "Sailor on the Sea of Tranquility" was one of the best short stories I read anywhere last year, whilst "Theme from Shaft" was even better.

As a reviewer and critic, I am concerned that many of your readers seem to be opposed to criticism. The Dave Hughes approach to criticism seems to be that if you don't like a story, ignore it. Unfortunately it doesn't work that way, fiction is like life, if nobody speaks out nothing changes. One of the purposes of avant garde or experimental fiction *is* to speak out, whether it is about the negative aspects of conventional fictional structures or about its particular subject matter or both. Good criticism says similar things – I recently reviewed books by Alan Steele and by Michael Kandel: I liked both of them but each had its faults which, as a critic, I pointed out in conjunction with their strengths. From this, and from other comments, authors will develop and readers will find the books or stories which deserve their attention. ❑

From: Syd Foster, Swansea

If you 'only' keep level with the most recent issue, you'll still be the most exciting periodical I've come across in creative fiction venues ... I *loved* the condensed writing of Kadrey in his poetic weaving of avant garde science and SF icons, and Moorcock's equally condensed poetic renaissance of Jerry Cornelius was easily the best J.C. evocation I've ever read, as it touched chords in me that the character's previous oeuvre simply never reached ... The cool poetry of the writing reminded me of the same author's *Dancers At the End of Time* series, which until now was the only piece of Moorcock's writing I've ever enjoyed. I'll make a point of getting hold of *Mother London* now!

You are playfully turning your magazine into a truly radical publishing event by the unexpected inclusions that have come along with this and the previous issue (in which the totally unannounced and unreferred-to [!] inclusion of the *Incunabula Press* insert 'pamphlet-cum-brochure' provided a puzzling and ultimately delightful experiment in presenting a fantasy story of the modern American school of mystic/journalistic media crazies!)

The beautiful poster by Kevin Cullen looks wonderful on the wall of my living room, and the rest of the artwork in #18 is of an equally high calibre. I also loved the layout of story/art in your presentation of Kadrey's piece. I really appreciate your magazine reviews as well, that's a vital and interesting part of **BBR**.

Keep up the high quality of fiction, and I know you'll do the rest. Keep us a little off-balance, and we'll really learn to dance! ❑

From: Paul Pinn, Bristol

BBR #18. (Quick sniff at the pages ... hmmmmm, that distinctive **BBR** smell sure does linger nicely. Pity you can't bottle it.) Anyway, excellent issue. "The Aliens' Midwife" and "Mr Keim Adrift" I could hook into straight away, the same with "Theme From Shaft" which carried me away with its 'reader drive'. "The Romanian Question" divided me: in parts I found the Easterman/newspaper extracts more interesting than the Jerry Cornelius stuff, and in other parts vice versa. As a whole it was good, and good to be reading Moorcock again.

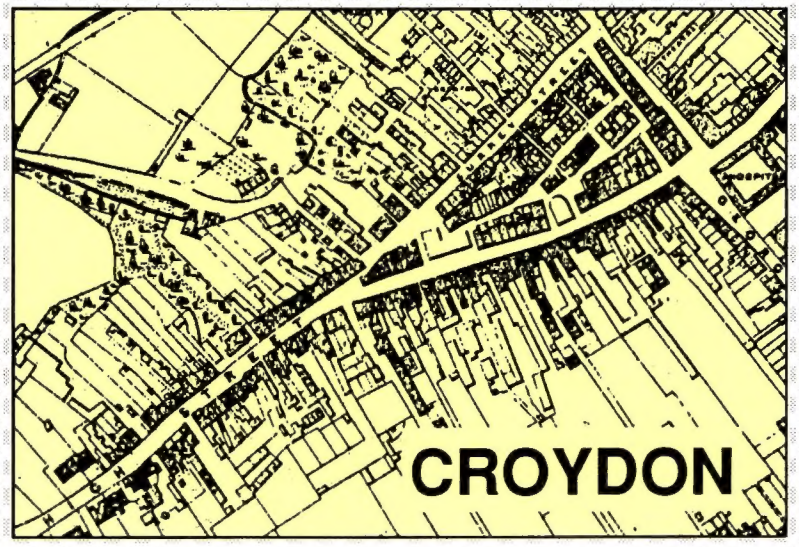
"Luchenko's Third Symphony" was probably the most demanding story in #18, and certainly different even if I couldn't get into it. (Probably need to read it in different circumstances). *Mogollón News*? Liked it. Your editorial? Liked it. Best artwork? Illos for "Luchenko" (Cullen is certainly one to watch) and "Keim". ❑

From: Peter Lamborn Wilson, New York

I'm pleased by the response to *Incunabula*. The reader who called it "interactive fiction" got it right – the idea of my 'false documents' is to provide frameworks for the reader's own imagination to construct a story, or to dream him/herself *into* the framework. Also the ideal reader is unable to decide (at least at first) whether the document is 'real' or fictional, and for a while is able to dream that it is real and that the reality is *desireable* – then, when it becomes obvious that it's a hoax, the reader should feel anger that the reality described is merely fictional. This anger should cause the reader to think "it *should* be real", and to contemplate the sort of scientific or political or social action which would *make* it real.

Thus your reviewer of *Semiotext(e) SF* got it exactly right when, speaking of "Visit Port Watson!", he said, "God, I hope I'm wrong – this place deserves to exist." (His only mistake was attributing the hoax to the wrong Wilson! Nudge-nudge.) ❑

If your luck runs out and you find yourself in



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